

2. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA FROM COLONEL GENERAL (R.) DR. LOTHAR RENDULIC

Colonel General (R.) Dr. Lothar Rendulic was born on October 23, 1887, in Wiener-Neustadt, Austria. He is the scion of an old Austrian military family. He also pursued a career in arms, graduating from the Tiresian Military Academy as an infantry lieutenant in 1910. At the outbreak of World War I, he served in the 99th Infantry Regiment, Vienna. He took part in that war fighting in the front line in Russia and Italy, from where he returned to his homeland, defeated, with a series of high decorations.

After the war he joined the General Staff of the Austrian Army with the rank of major, and completed his law studies at the University of Vienna, obtaining a doctorate in law. In 1933 he was promoted to colonel and then appointed military attaché of the Federal Republic at the embassies in Paris and London.

In 1938 he was inducted into the German Wehrmacht as Chief of Staff of the XVII Army Corps in Vienna. In 1940, as Brigadier General, he commanded the 52.^a Infantry Division with which he distinguished himself especially in the Winter Battle in front of Moscow. He was awarded the decorations of the "Golden German Cross" and the "Knight's Cross" and two years later, as an infantry general (third rank of general) he was commander of the Army Corps which was in charge of the defense of the eastern sector in the great bend of Orel.

In 1943/44, Rendulic was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the 2nd Armored Army in the Balkans and promoted to Colonel General. After the death of Colonel General Dietl in 1944, he succeeds him as Commander-in-Chief of the XX Mountain Army in Lapland; there he distinguishes himself in an outstanding way in the withdrawal of this mountain army which had been isolated due to the Finnish attitude. In extremely difficult circumstances and despite the polar storms and the lack of roads, he managed to prevent the army from being annihilated and taken prisoner. At the beginning of 1945 he was entrusted with the command of Army Group "North" (East Prussia) and Army Group "Curland", followed on April 8, 1945 by Army Group "South" (Austrian Front). On May 7, 1945, he was taken prisoner of war and was brought before the Nuremberg Tribunal in September 1946, where he was sentenced in February 1948 as a war criminal to 20 years' imprisonment.

Three years later, half of his sentence was commuted. Shortly before Christmas of the following year, President Truman, responding to a request from numerous officers of all ranks in the Austrian Army, released him.

Colonel General Rendulic is the Austrian military man who distinguished himself the most in World War II. In addition to his vast general and military training, which can be seen in the pages of this book, he was an outstanding driver, which earned him the trust of his superiors.

Died January 18, 1971 in Eferding.

PREFACE

This book is not intended to glorify war. The military, especially if he knows its errors, does not want it. This does not prevent, however, to record that war is precisely the field where the high military virtues are externalized, in the widest measure, honor, loyalty, sense of duty, courage,

strength of resolution, obedience, comradeship, willingness to help and altruism. For this reason, a good soldier will always be a valuable member of the community. People who could not sustain these virtues in the life of the community have, after the war, with well-defined intent, brought them into the mud and disrepute. The transcendental importance of the concept of life that is manifested in those virtues, imposes him to fight with renewed energies against his opponents, as well as against the incomprehension of those who do not know what they do, and to break through. One of the tasks of the old soldiers is to cooperate in this struggle.

I consider it a particular obligation to point out, in many parts of this book, the high military qualities that distinguished those who fought in the groupings I have led. Not all comrades had the good fortune of a happy return. It is with deep regret that we remember those who sealed their loyalty with their lives. We express our affection to all those who are still prisoners, together with our longing for their liberation.

In the present memoirs I have tried to give an account of the development of the war in different regions of Eastern Europe, in the Balkans and in the far north of the continent. Although the events were to be placed in the foreground of the narrative, I have left ample space for the description of the way in which they were presented to me and the demands they made on me. It follows that I have had to mention especially the close relationship between impressions, thoughts and personal actions on the one hand, and events on the other.

In the last war I led two Infantry Divisions, one in France; then an Army Corps, two Armies and three Army Groups between the Greek frontier and the North Cape. At the beginning of the war against Russia I commanded an Infantry Division. It is natural that the recollections of that period should cover a greater amount of detail, as well as aspects of a different nature than those of the following one, in which I had been entrusted with the command of larger groupings. In this book I deal, although not to the extent I would have wished, with the countries to which the war took me, with their peoples and their landscapes. Military operations are greatly influenced by the nature of the region in which they are to be carried out and often also by the characteristics of the people. Without knowledge of these characteristics, and without a very careful consideration of the terrain, the maximum success with the least losses will not be achieved in a fight. This applies to all echelons of leadership. The consideration of these two circumstances, and of all the others that favor success and reduce losses, were also imposed by the fact that we always had to fight in numerical inferiority and, frequently, material inferiority.

In war a driver in accomplishing missions and mastering situations is absorbed by them in such an intense way that he lives them intimately and becomes unified with them. They are at once deeply engraved in the memory and then appear in the mind as they were.

experienced. This is especially true when the missions were difficult and the situations critical. Certainly, there was no shortage of those. It will not be a shortcoming of this book that, in writing it, I had no orders or annotations and was limited almost exclusively to my recollections. This material was presented to me in such abundance that I had to make a constant choice. It is not excluded, however, that in a small part, here or there, my memory failed.

In this book I have hardly mentioned any names other than those of my immediate collaborators. The reason for this is that the number of people I should have mentioned by name is too great for me to do anyone an injustice. Besides, I no longer have the names of some of them, especially deserving ones, and I am not in a position to find them out at present. My accounts try to reproduce what I

4. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

experienced as it was presented to me at the time. I have changed nothing of the atmosphere in which the events unfolded, even though the period since the war has brought a knowledge of the facts that often far exceeds what I had at the time. I have not used this later knowledge, because I wish to reproduce what I really experienced and not to present a perspective from a more recent period.

Lothar Rendulic, 1952.

Chapter 1

RUSSIA

At the beginning of 1941, the 52nd Infantry Division I commanded was in Burgundy (France). We had arrived in the fall of 1940. With the occupation of most of France, Belgium, Holland, Norway and Poland, as well as the evident abandonment of the intention to land in England, we had reached a situation from which we could not see, either politically or militarily, the course of future development. It was clear to us, however, that the wheels of politics were turning at great speed and that, militarily too, the last word had not been said in this war. A decision had not yet been made.

In that time of calm charged with high tension I realized clearly that the mass of the population is only an object of policy, without any influence over it, and that resolutions in all States are, strictly speaking, only adopted by a very few. And when I reflected on the manner in which these resolutions were produced, I recognized that along with the spirit and character of the persons acting, there was an unlimited field of influences and coincidences, but also a series of definite facts which arose and gravitated in an imperative way. The resolutions which fundamentally determine the course of events are the result of the influence and weight of these numerous factors, to which it is still added that frequently many of them cannot be accurately appreciated either in their nature or in their extent. In view of this it was entirely natural that reflections on the near future should arouse thoughts about human destiny.

Soon our view directed westward was diverted to the evolution of the conflict in eastern and southeastern Europe. It was becoming increasingly evident that the friendly relations between the Reich and Russia, initiated with the treaty of August 23, 1939, had suffered a sharp cooling because of Russian aspirations for expansion over Finland, the Baltic States and Bessarabia. The Russians, on the other hand, were displeased (we learned this only later) by Hitler's refusal of their demand for footholds in the Dardanelles area. In any case, the displeasure that Molotov's visit in October 1940 had left in Berlin could not be ignored. The naturalness with which, since August 1939, the German-Russian friendship had been spoken of as a matter of course also in Wehrmacht circles gave way, from the winter of 1940, to a growing skepticism. The intense activity in Russian politics was for us the real question mark facing the future.

In Greece, with the authorization of its government, the British had landed forces in mid-March 1941, with which that country had practically renounced its neutrality. In Yugoslavia, in the second half of March, General Simovitch overthrew the government which had signed an agreement with the Reich and decreed a secret general mobilization, two acts which were clearly directed against Germany. Russia's friendly telegram of March 27, 1941 to General Simovitch further clarified the situation.

The British in the Balkans and a hostile-oriented Yugoslavia meant, naturally, a dangerous threat to southern Europe, but also to the situation in every part of the world.

of the Reich's eastern border.

The elimination of this danger required, first of all, the rejection of the British in Greece. For the operation against Greece, planned before the overthrow of the government of Yugoslavia, it had to be carried out through Bulgaria, since a mobilized Yugoslavia, evidently against the Reich, situated on the flank, represented a threat which could not be endured. By the force of circumstances, the war against Yugoslavia thus arose, as a consequence of the war against Greece imposed by the British landing. The operations began on April 6 and ended in the same month with the capitulation of both

6. *Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic*

states.

Prior to the Balkan wars, in early spring, news began to leak out that Russia was steadily moving forces toward its new western border, which ran through Poland. The installation of a considerable number of new airfields was also verified there. A Division was too small a grouping to be officially informed about the situation in the east, even more so if it was stationed in France. Only later did I learn that at the end of the spring of 1941, in the area of the Russian western frontier, 155 Divisions, or two thirds of the Russian forces known at that time, had been ascertained.

At the beginning of 1941, the mass of the German forces was west of the Rhine, a part in Poland and small numbers of troops in Norway. In March the troops needed for the Balkans were withdrawn for the most part from France; others were also transported from there to Poland. The secrecy was successfully preserved to the extent that not only the destination area but also the general direction of the transport movement was unknown.

The 52nd Division was gradually left alone; the Armored Division to our north had been transported, we later learned, to the Balkans, and the Infantry Division stationed to our west was also moved eastward. Were we to remain in France?

This question was asked by everyone, down to the last soldier of the Division, who had taken part in the war against France and had been in one of the richest regions of that country for almost a year. It is true that the training work, which was going on all the time, often put great strain on the personnel. It would be difficult to conceive of more pleasant circumstances for a soldier than those in which the Division was living, because of the friendly conduct of the inhabitants, the beauty of this privileged region, the good climate, the good lodgings and the abundant supplies. The postal censorship reports stated, however, that the great majority of the letters expressed concern that the Division would be left as an occupying force in France and thus prevented from participating in events in other regions of Europe, the approach of which was instinctively felt.

I also confirmed here an observation that I was able to make several times in my life and that is that even the private soldier finds, in the long run, little satisfaction when he is dominated by inactivity and only action, in any of its many forms, gives the desired content to life.

I still remember, as if it were today, a sultry hot day in the first half of June 1941 when I received the order to enlist the 52nd Division for transport by rail. It did not say where it was to go; however, we all knew that it could only be eastward. The moment had now arrived when fate would open a new chapter in the book of my life as well as in that of the 15,000 men entrusted to my command. Sometimes in life, before the porticoes of a future shrouded in darkness, the words that Göthe put into the mouth of his Egmont came to my memory:

"As driven by furious lashes of unseen spirits, cross time the horses of the sun, carrying the light carriage of our destiny, and to us there is nothing left but, animated with courage, to hold fast the reins and, as soon to the right as to the left, to turn the wheels here from a rock and there from a precipice. Whither one goes, who knows, one hardly remembers whence one comes!"

Pictures and impressions of the eastern front in the IGM emerged before my eyes: a landscape which by its lack of limits was strange and often made its weight felt on our emotional state, but which at other times, by its grandeur and power, lifted the spirit. And in that landscape, men acted who, although extremely primitive, showed a very developed sensibility, often oriented also in a particular direction, which we could only with difficulty and incompletely discover. We had a good memory of the soldier of the time of the tsars: he was good-natured, decent and respected the laws of

war.

We were concerned about the nature of Russia, completely different from that of the European West, which had only a few railroads and firm roads to bridge the vastness of its space. It was doubtful whether in such circumstances our material superiority, in which we then believed, could make itself felt. Did the war mean the displacement of our forces to the east? In the final analysis, forces had been moving eastward for a year. The purpose of further movements could also be an increase in the security of the eastern border, a countermeasure against Russian concentrations or political pressure on Russia. It is true that I would not have formulated such reflections if I had already known at that time the high degree of military preparedness of the Russians and the considerable number of combatant forces they had on their western border. The Supreme Command was aware of the number of Russian Divisions, far superior to that of the German Army Divisions; but surely it had missed, as well as the whole world, the magnitude of the general military preparedness of Russia.

On 18 June the embarkation of the division units began. While the division was being transported on some 70 trains through Germany to Poland, I drove on 22 June to Vienna, where I said goodbye to my wife and son, and then continued on to Lodz, where I was to learn the purpose of the journey the next day. The journey was through Lower Austria, Moravia and Silesia. At noon we crossed a Silesian village, whose inhabitants were gathered in large groups on the main street. Here I heard the news transmitted over the radio that on the morning of that day the state of war had been declared between the Reich and Russia. The dice had been thrown!

According to the then prevailing views, a state can only risk war if it is convinced of success, unless it immediately fights for its existence. The considerations on which a war resolution is based must cover a large number of aspects. In addition to the political situation, the political possibilities and objectives, these aspects include the geopolitical circumstances, the potential of the economy from raw materials and labor forces to the production capacity, as well as the

than the military potential and the spirit of the people and the armed forces. In these calculations must also be included the imponderable factors that are found in the special circumstances of the time, those factors, due to the insecurity of covering them all and in their just measure, influence in a considerable way in the risk, increasing it.

In the considerations that in analogous form also have to be made about the adversary, the bases are often very imprecise and full of gaps, so that great sources of errors had to be counted on. It was thus obvious that the result of the account could never claim mathematical accuracy. Moreover, to this is added as an essential factor the constant uncertainty about the forms of a future war, which always differ from the preceding wars and whose appreciation is exposed to the numerous insecurities of theoretical speculation.

These thoughts crossed my mind when I heard the news of the outbreak of war against Russia. A deep seriousness came over me, and it seemed to me to extend to the smiling, sun-filled landscape through which we were moving. Naturally, I analyzed anew the prospects for the success of this war; but, as always up to then, I was unable to arrive at a satisfactory answer, for I constantly collided with the lack of precise bases, which were decisive for the appraisal.

I often recalled those hours when after the war I heard people pretending to have recognized already at that time the lack of favorable prospects of the war against Russia. They, no doubt, must also have lacked the basis for a competent judgment. If their expressions are not the result of later

8. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

inventions, they could only have judged on the basis of a spiritual and sentimental predisposition, without the possibility of a legitimate foundation. I have often said that in great and small matters of life, chance has often justified the one who pretended to know better. The latter then loudly proclaims the glory of his better judgment. If events do not, however, follow the predicted course, then the one who claimed to know better keeps silent and his error is not known or is known only to a few.

Later I became convinced that this war was not to be lost if the preconditions for its conduct had been created, in the form of sufficient forces.

This was absolutely within the realm of possibility, and even more within the realm of the obvious and implicit. But this will be dealt with later, as soon as we advance in the analysis of the war against Russia, which will allow us to express a judgment that is close to reality.

At that time I did not know anyone in the circle of my relations who was not convinced that the Reich leadership knew what it was doing and that it was also making all the preparations to ensure the success of this war.

The next day, June 23, I continued the trip through Warsaw to Minsk-Wolhynsk, following the great Brest-Litovsk highway. Warsaw showed no great destruction in the streets we crossed. The Vistula was in low water and did not seem to be, in that state, an obstacle worth mentioning. The great bridge was unscathed. In Minsk-Wolhynsk was the headquarters of the XXXV Army Corps, where I received the first orientation on the situation and on the assembly area assigned to the Division. I could not have suspected then that 16 months later I was to assume command of this Corps, when I had penetrated well into the Russian interior. The Division's assembly area was on the Bug (the river

The border between Russia and Poland) in the region immediately southwest of Brest Litovsk. If I had not known the east since the IGM it would have taken me a long time to master the spiritual despondency that the landscape created. The dark soil of this plain produced only potatoes and scanty oats and rye. The inhabitants and their accommodations made a poor impression. Due to the lack of bricks the thatched houses are built of wood and mud, and only in a few villages in the Division's jurisdiction were there masonry school buildings. There were no houses in which there were no parasites, among which bedbugs predominated. Water was drawn by bucket from open wells and only boiled water could be drunk. Vehicles moved heavily, making their way on the soft sandy roads.

The summer heat of the continental climate dominated. The Bug, located a short distance away, is a typical lowland river, with many branches and swampy banks. Here are the breeding grounds of innumerable mosquitoes, which become a real plague during twilight and night.

On June 21, 141 German Divisions had begun the offensive against Russia. The attack had been successful everywhere. The German units had passed the Bug and were in combat east of the river. From the radiograms captured from the Russian groups it could be deduced that the Russians had been completely surprised by the attack.

In order to achieve this surprise, extensive measures of deception had been adopted. Although in October 1940 the projected invasion of England had been definitely abandoned, preparations were occasionally made in the period that followed which should produce the impression that the plan continued to be carried out. In May 1941 they were intensively accelerated, both on the Channel coast and also in Norway. Troop transports, concentrations of floating material, landing exercises,

etc., were carried out on a large scale. News was also disseminated which was to reach the ears of enemy agents. In the first half of June 1941 there appeared in the *Volkischen Beobachter* an article by Göbbels in which an invasion of England was announced between the lines. In order to make such an invasion appear more probable, shortly after its appearance, the newspaper with the article was withdrawn from circulation, in a disguised form, but in such a way that it could not fail to reach the hands of enemy agents. The reproduction of the article by other organs of the press was not authorized. This maneuver had succeeded in diverting the attention of the Russians to their eastern border. In later times we carried out similar large-scale operational deception maneuvers; for the most part they were successful.

In Brest Litovsk, the core of the old fortress, the so-called Citadel, continued to hold out until June 28. The solid stone building, the lower floor of which was two stories below ground level, withstood the fire of the artillery pieces of the field army. Only after the bombardment with a special piece, brought for that purpose, the Citadel surrendered with its 350 defenders. They reported that the commissary of the frontier forced them to continue fighting. When the situation became desperate, he proceeded to his self-blasting. It was the first time I heard of the effectiveness of a commissar. He appeared as the representative of extreme fighting will and must have exerted a very great influence on the soldiers in that redoubt.

From the tower of the church in a nearby village, there was an extensive view over the plains of the

nicies of the Bug, of the Russian region. The day before our departure, June 25, I was up there and gazed at the infinite, slightly undulating plain, fully illuminated by the radiant sun, up to the distant horizon that vanished in a faint mist. Disregarding some small isolated woods, the ground was covered by green and yellow fields; here and there I saw the thin brown thread of a piece of dirt road. Across that landscape ran, from the Bug eastward, the bright light gray ribbon of the great concrete highway. Strangely impressive was the thought that it constituted the shortest way to Moscow. In some parts, the rails of a railroad track reflected the sun's rays with sparkles and vivid lights. Only a few vehicles followed the great road eastward. Rarely could an entire supply column be recognized. And it was only two or three days since fighting had taken place here and dozens of divisions filled this area. It seemed now as if the huge space had "swallowed up" all these forces, both one's own and those of the enemy. An unusual feeling, with a slight tinge of uneasiness, overcame me here as I thought that in front of me was Russia with the mysterious mystique of its endless space.

On 26 June the Division was assembled, except for small fractions still missing, and was to start the march. It passed the Bug over the two-story high wooden bridge on the southern edge of Brest Litovsk. The big road leading eastward toward Smolensk was reserved for motorized and armored units as well as for supply, so we had to use a very sandy country road north of it. From the edge of the town, situated on an elevation, I had a wide view to the east, similar to that of the previous day, from the church tower. In a very deep marching column the Division was moving; battalions, batteries and baggage, in a continuous form, as if animated by an intimate, indomitable impulse; it was a picture of uncontainable force. In this observation was mixed, however, the somber thought that many of these men would no longer find their way back to the Fatherland. Who would have this destiny? Would the fate of each one be already firmly fixed in the arcane of time or is it a result of chance? Perhaps this question has not been posed adequately. In any case, the aftermath of the war, in which I saw so many destinies fulfilled, did not bring me an answer to it either. Again and again it

10. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

was evident that the incalculable and the indeterminable seem to be part of the essence of destiny. I have always had the feeling that precisely the inscrutability of destiny and the impenetrable veil that covers it are a great blessing for men.

A few days later the units in front of us made a conversion to the north for the Bialystok pocket and thus we found ourselves in the front line. The Russians, in front of us, did the best they could do after the setbacks suffered in the border fights: they retreated. We followed them on long marches, for which we had only precarious natural roads at our disposal. From time to time we saw traces of the fighting: groups of Russian light tanks put out of action and numerous small Russian anti-tanks. The troops, who in the first days of the march were generally very fatigued, were gradually getting used to long distances. The same was not true of the cattle. Without the rest days that were sometimes interspersed, most of them would not have endured the considerable efforts.

After crossing the Russian-Polish border existing before the war against Poland in 1939, we passed the so-called "Stalin line". The Russians must have begun construction of this defensive line not long before. Concrete fortifications for several artillery pieces and machine guns, located at relatively large distances from each other, had just been completed. But they were not yet armed; nor did they have any obstacles or intermediate works. The work had evidently been abruptly interrupted by the war. The rapidly unfolding events deprived the Russian command of the possibility of using the completed works for fighting.

In the former Russian-Polish border region we crossed a predominantly agricultural area with small poor villages. Around July 10 we reached a region of huge forest areas; we were approaching the Beresina. There we got our first impression of the vast Russian forests. Here we also had the first faint combat contact with the enemy. When we were marching through the large wooded region we were presented with a completely exceptional situation because, according to prisoners' statements, to the south of the wooded area were several thousand Russians and some high commandos; the German armored groupings, which had advanced along the great road to Bobruisk on the Beresina through that area, saw the road and the bridges to the town cut off, so they were pushed northward. The 52nd Division was too weak to advance against these forces in the extensive wooded region; the march, moreover, was not to be delayed. Thus we could do nothing but leave them on the right. On July 12 we passed the Beresina at Swislotsch.

I was very interested in seeing the Beresina, whose passage in the winter of 1812 meant one of the most dangerous crises for Napoleon's already greatly reduced army. That passage took place about 50 miles north of our location. The river I saw carried little water and crossed a wide flooded region situated between extensive wooded areas. The whole region that the view could dominate in a huge expanse, from the high steep ravine at Swislotsch, produced the impression of something wild and unspoiled. The railroad bridge and the road bridge, crossing the river, impressed as foreign bodies. The banks are uninhabited; nowhere is a village to be seen, only forest and river. The same overwhelming feeling of being lost, picked up in the woods on the Beresina, I experienced again in the virgin forests of Lapland.

The armored groupings advancing south had passed the Beresina at Bobruisk and continued to Rogatshev on the Dnieper; but they could not force the river passage there. They turned northward and fought at Mohilev for the passage, succeeding. Along the road from Bobruisk to Rogatshev now advanced the LIII Corps with two infantry Divisions, one of them my Division.

After the Beresina Pass (which for the 35 km. long Division's marching column required a whole

day) we marched still for another day on dirt roads through high woods, reaching a firm road which from Bobruisk leads in a north-westerly direction towards Mohilev. We were ordered to follow this road and thus moved considerably away from our Army Corps.

On July 15 at sunset the Division rested in a marching column along the road. There was no village in the whole area. The day was extraordinarily hot and absolutely windless. The units marched permanently enveloped by dense, high clouds of dust rising from the road surface covered by a thick layer of dust.

The trees, too, were soon covered with a light gray layer; the color of green could no longer be distinguished from that of green. The trees, too, were soon covered with a light gray layer; the green color could no longer be distinguished. Likewise our faces had become almost unrecognizable because of the dense layer of dust that acted like a mask. The marches carried out in such conditions fatigued the units to a high degree, which, however, were not going to find much rest during the night. The first great combat of the Division was imminent (Sketch N° 1).

The main force of our Army Corps advancing to the south had clashed west of the Dnieper and its tributary, the Druth, against enemy forces that put up stubborn resistance and also proved to be numerically superior. Shortly thereafter and totally unexpectedly for the Army Corps, the enemy went on the attack. The units found themselves in a difficult situation. This induced the Army Corps Command to approach my Division. On July 15 at nightfall, shortly after the Division passed to rest, I received the order to resume the march immediately and reach the Ozerany area, which for most of the units represented a new march of 15 to 25 km. There the Division was to stand ready to gain the eastern bank of the Druth and advance on Rogatshev.

Ozerany is a village on the west bank of the Druth about 25 km. north of Rogatshev. A regiment was to be advanced in trucks to the left wing of the parts of the Corps which were in combat and which were particularly threatened. For this purpose I chose the tail regiment of the Division, as it was the most favorably situated from the point of view of the roads. The bulk of the Division reached the ordered area after a grueling night march over boggy forest roads and, in the vicinity of the Druth, deep sand. There it was about 12 km away from the northern wing of the fighting forces. At Ozerany the large wooded area also ended, giving birth to a wide region of fertile agricultural fields extending 30 km. southward and from the Dnieper westward to the Beresina, forming a fully cultivated area.

The units that had marched a full day and the following night urgently needed several hours of rest. During this time reconnaissance was carried out. A part of the scouting detachment gained, by a ford, the densely wooded eastern bank of the Druth. It collided shortly afterward with enemy of unestablished strength. An enemy battery on the eastern bank opened fire on Ozerany, where the Division command had just been installed. One house after another was set on fire by it and we had to hastily leave the locality. In spite of the rush I was struck by the intense roaring noise, similar to thunder, produced by the fire as it devoured the houses with dry thatched roofs in a few minutes. The enemy battery was silenced in a short time by a group of artillery. We moved on to a village further west, on the edge of the forest.

There was no communication with the Corps command as the Division's radio station was temporarily out of service. I assumed that it was still in Bobruisk, on the Beresina, a town some 45 km. away as the crow flies. An officer of orders sent there, who had to use marshy and sandy roads, being noon had not yet returned. To the south the fighting was still going on. In the late morning hours an officer of the Division fighting there arrived and requested urgent support, as the Russian pressure could no longer be resisted for long.

In this situation I assessed that there was only one resolution: to attack to the south, even though I

12. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

knew the intention of the corps commander to advance me along the eastern bank of the Druth towards Rogatschev. There was no doubt that an advance on Rogatschev, if successful, would be of great effectiveness, for in that way the Russian combat front west of the Dnieper and the Druth would become untenable and the conquest of the bridges at Rogatschev could also be counted on. It is true that the success of such an advance was uncertain. Nor was it to be expected that sufficient judgment on the enemy on the eastern margin would be obtained in a short time; judging from the situation it could not be appreciated as of very strong effect. A direct advance to the south was to collide perpendicularly with the Russian flank and achieve immediate tactical effectiveness, even though its projections would probably be smaller.

I resolved to advance with the Division immediately after the lunch distribution, and attack southward. The attack would be directed against the space about 10 km. wide between the Druth and the Russian fighting front in attack to the west. The effectiveness of this flank attack, which has probably been unique in the war, could only be nullified by the Russians if they opposed the Division offensively with forces of sufficient strength to beat it, or at least to keep it as far away as possible from the fighting that was going on. The Russian Command chose another solution, about which we remained for a long time in the dark, for in those days we had, inexplicably, no air scouting. This disadvantage was a consequence of the unfavorable relationship of dependence on the air weapon, a disadvantage which was still to manifest itself very frequently. Towards noon the order was received from the Army Corps, which prescribed the immediate attack to the south in order to send the forces fighting there. The Division was already preparing for this attack.

The terrain to the south of where the fighting was taking place was slightly undulating and, as far as the eye could see, was covered with yellowish grain crops, among which were the dark patches of large potato fields. That July 16, when the Division was engaged in its first major engagement in Russia, was a day of blazing sunshine.

The first combat was awaited by all of us with the utmost expectation. It was presented to us in such circumstances that each one of us was convinced of success, in spite of the fact that we knew nothing about the enemy's strength. In the last hours of the morning the order to attack was given to the units. These units began the advance at 13:00 hours already in combat device. The Russians had established a defensive front of about 10 km. long, with a northern front, between the right wing of their attack front to the west and the Druth. On this defensive front were two villages and a small forest, which later proved to be a strong foothold.

About two hours later, most of the batteries were already under fire and barely an hour later the infantry attack began. The Russians defended themselves with great tenacity; however, at nightfall not only had the "northern front" been taken, but also the eastern front had been overwhelmed to a depth of 10 km. Only in the strip of land right next to the Druth was the attack, after initial successes, unable to gain ground, because the flank action of the machine guns and especially of the artillery, from the eastern bank of the river, was extraordinarily intense and could not be eliminated. To this must be attributed that the Russians managed to hold a strip of land of about 4 to 5 km. of wide on the western margin. The remnants of the western front thrown out by the flank attack retreated there. On this day we took prisoners from three divisions.

The aforementioned small forest, which had been fortified, turned out to be the key point of the newly established Russian northern front. It could not be taken in the first attack. After several concentrations of fire from all the artillery on it, a new attack finally succeeded in conquering it. Here we were presented with a grim picture. In the riflemen's trenches dug on the edge of the forest, and further back, lay several hundred dead Russians. Most of them had cut their throats with razors.

Some totally horrified prisoners stated that they had been told that the Germans would shoot all the prisoners. Almost all of them had a razor in the shank of their boot. Their statements also reflected their great fear of the commissars, who eliminated all those who refused to attack or who retreated.

With the onset of darkness the fire diminished. Resolutions had now to be made for the following day. It was understood that the attack must go on; it was necessary to fix clearly the manner of carrying it out. The bolt position in which the Russians last set foot seemed to present in the center the best conditions for the approach of the infantry, judging from the various reports. For that reason the center of gravity was to be taken there. The device of infantry and artillery required for this purpose was taken under cover of darkness.

The units also carried out during the night all the other necessary movements, which could not have been carried out during the day because of the enemy fire. In such situations an intense traffic is carried out behind the front, which often impressed; the wounded are brought to the rear and then evacuated by the wounded transport wagons which have been brought forward as far as possible; the ammunition wagons of all weapons proceed to their delivery; the field kitchens approach their units as far as possible. In the last stretch, however, the food must be carried by carriers to the units on the front lines. Those hundreds of trucks and hiccupping mobile vehicles that during the night go without lights in both directions and, among them, the many soldiers on foot, produce the impression of a chaotic disorder because of the natural frictions and stops, and yet everything is carried out in a methodical way, according to a plan and with a clear intention. In spite of this, I often had to be amazed that everyone reached their destination. Occasional fire surprises frequently caused us losses and disturbances. Units and baggage acquire already soon after being in a combat zone an accurate knowledge of the places and paths to be avoided. In the morning, with daylight, all night activity disappears and the terrain seems dead.

In areas of intense tactical activity it is certainly not possible to carry out such traffic in the immediate vicinity of the front. There, everything necessary for the latter must be carried on the shoulder, already from several kilometers behind. Supplying the front line is then extremely difficult and often results in losses. We would soon find ourselves in such a situation.

The next morning the attack was continued southward with the Division in the device adopted during the night. Given the numerical superiority of the Russians, the fighting placed very high demands on the units and on the leadership skills of their leaders. It was with great satisfaction that I verified that the cooperation of arms, so often practiced in France, had been applied in the reality of combat in the best possible way. The enemy was forced to retreat everywhere and retreated to his position about 5 km. west of the Druth. About noon we reached the great Bobruisk-Rogatschev road; after reaching a favorable line south of it I ordered to suspend the attack, as the Army Corps had left it to my resolution to fix the limit of the attack. On the one hand, the neighboring activities needed no relief, for the enemy had not attacked there; on the other hand, the Division was now to occupy and defend the conquered area; it had reached a width of 16 km. The division could not be assigned a greater width. The units to which relief had been brought were withdrawn from the front and given a new task further south.

Again we took prisoners from the three Divisions already checked as well as from a new Division. The Russians showed especially that day great tenacity and fought fiercely. In several places they fought back to the last man. In the statements of the prisoners the commissar again played a great role. They were terrified of him. In the hands of the commissars was the life-and-death decision of the individual members of the units; also that of the officers. The officers, as well as the soldiers taken prisoner, were surprised that they were not shot. One had to see the nervousness and fear in the

14. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

eyes of these men to understand how they were convinced of their imminent death. When they heard our statement that the German units did not shoot the prisoners, they would become loquacious. The problem of the commissars, which presented itself at every moment, seemed to me to be of great importance.

Attention was drawn to an officer's statement that numerous Russian forces were advancing and that a major offensive was intended in that area.

The Division's flank attack had not only defeated the Russian offensive against the northern wing of the Corps but had also succeeded in driving the enemy back to near the Druth and the Dnieper, inflicting heavy losses on three or four opposing Divisions. The Division now occupied the 16 km. wide front eastward from the left wing of the former combat zone to 1 km. south of the great road and organized there for defense.

The units of the Division, led by their capable and courageous commanders, had performed outstandingly well in their first major combat in Russia. They were soon to be presented with new and especially difficult tests.

The front on the Dnieper was the linking element between Army Group "South", which was advancing to our right on Kiev and Army Group "Center" which, with its mass to the north of us and with the commitment of numerous armored groupings, had already gained much ground east of the Dnieper to beyond Smolensk. It had halted there to stock up on ammunition, fuel and supplies. The town of Bobruisk, on the Beresina, situated behind us, was becoming an important supply center, for the railroad passing through it was soon put back into service to it.

2. Russia

Russian offensive in the Rogatshev area

Man and soil in the Bobruisk area

The Division had only a few days to fortify its position. Obstacles had not yet been placed in front of the trenches or mines, when the Russians went on the attack from their positions on the western bank of both rivers. The attacks went on daily for more than two weeks. Also during the night the enemy artillery directed its fire in the depth of the Division and on all the roads of advance.

Daily three to four Russian Divisions, once as many as five, attacked the 52nd Infantry Division's belt. Soon a new Russian artillery grouping was located, composed of 20 heavy batteries, which were firing excellently. According to prisoners' statements, it was the Moscow Artillery School.

Attacks undertaken for 15 days in succession with great superiority and renewed several times a day were generally preceded by a long artillery preparation. The Russians seemed to have unlimited quantities of ammunition.

The situation of the widespread division was often extremely critical; reserves were dwindling more and more; losses, especially from artillery fire, were considerable. Soon the last reserve was consumed. From the parts of the front which in each case were attacked, small groups were drawn out and sent to the threatened sectors. This went on day after day.

Only by means of an uninterrupted series of arbitrariness was it possible to keep the front firm. The artillery could only shoot as much as the tubes would carry. In a short time two batteries had only one piece each; another one had all its pieces disabled. We also had plenty of ammunition. Even the last truck of the Division was used to bring ammunition from the army delivery points. It was impossible to relieve the units that were

permanently engaged in combat. The exhaustion of the men finally became so intense that, among other episodes, a battery in a critical period of the combat did not fire a shot because the whole service of the pieces fell fast asleep, in the middle of the day, during the fight.

We could not count on the slightest reinforcement. Nor did any replacement personnel arrive. The Russians received replacement units several times during that period; they showed great skill in their incorporation, even in the groups that were engaged in combat. The conduct of the fight was, in addition, extremely difficult because we did not have any aerial exploration.

In the first days of these great and hard fights we learned something of the purpose of that enigmatic Russian offensive. An English newspaper reported on an offensive launched from the Rogatshev area and directed by Marshal Timoshenko, which was aimed at the flank and the backs of the German central group of Armies, whose mass had already penetrated deep to the east of the Dnieper. Although the Russian attacks showed a power that reached the extreme limit of the resistance capacity of a Division, the troops committed for an offensive with such a distant objective were, undoubtedly, too weak. It was unclear what the purpose of this information might have been. Did he want to influence the resolutions of the German leadership? Or did he want to influence the neutral countries? It was now clear, in any case, what the cause was for the

The Russians held the western bank of the Dnieper and the Druth as bridgeheads, while in the north the German troops were already far to the east of the river. And it was equally clear that the center of gravity of this offensive was directed against the 52nd Infantry Division.

On the 14th day of fighting, the crisis reached a threatening culmination. It was no longer even possible to resort to the arbitrariness of constituting reserves formed by few men. I was left with no other possibilities of intervention than the influence on the conduct of the artillery fight and on the spirit of the commanders. Here the importance of high quality commanders, who are up to the most difficult situations and who lead their units with firmness and calm serenity, was shown.

Towards noon of that 14th, when the fighting was again in full swing and the forces of will and nervous energies were taxed to the utmost, the Corps Commander left me free to take the resolution to push the Division back to a line 20 km. farther west and even as far as the Beresina, forming a bridgehead in front of Bobruisk. He added that if the Division were broken in the fighting it would be nullified for an indeterminate time and that in that case the important direction to Bobruisk would not be covered. I was deeply surprised that I was granted such a wide freedom of action, since an eventual resolution to withdraw from my Division would necessarily impose the withdrawal of the other Divisions of the Corps. I had the impression that this was a transfer of responsibility from the superior to the subordinate.

Given the existing conditions of combat, especially the lack of any reserve, a withdrawal of the Division would in no way guarantee the maintenance of the new zone. The immediate pursuit of the superior adversary had to be counted on; it had also to be admitted, given his superiority, that he would arrive simultaneously with us at the new position. Although I knew little of the Russians and their commands, I should undoubtedly expect an energetic procedure from any attacking adversary.

I dismissed the thought of a retreat, although I clearly realized that I was thereby assuming greater responsibility for the maintenance of the position. I learned from this that senior managers should never communicate their concerns to their subordinates and that they should never transfer or cede even a part of their own responsibility to them, as this creates the danger of weakening the energy of others, especially in difficult situations. On the other hand, there is no doubt that an increased responsibility can increase the consciousness of your personality and with it also the energy. A critical situation is not exactly the opportunity to perform a difficult psychological experiment, the outcome of which is always doubtful.

I must admit that the authorization received to withdraw induced me to think about the possibility of a withdrawal to a greater extent than it would have been without it and that the rejection of that idea demanded more energy than the rejection of the temptation to propose, on my own initiative, the resolution of a

16. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

withdrawal.

By nightfall of the 14th some small parts of the position had been lost which, in the last analysis, was of little importance. Otherwise, the position had been held. In the evening it was possible to place plate mines in front of a little attacked sector; a battalion in front of which the enemy had established itself at a short distance, was withdrawn several hundred meters to a more favorable situation. These measures made it possible to form reserves consisting of groups of about 10 to 12 men, which were directed to the most exposed sectors. Also, repaired artillery pieces were used again and others were received from the rear, with which the unused ones could be replaced. As commander of the Division, I had never had to deal with such small details before; nor had the situation required me to do so before. Under the conditions of the time, they were of the utmost importance.

The next morning, anxiously awaited, began with the drumming fire of the enemy's artillery. In several places it was again possible to smash in a timely manner Russian positions of haste. To beat the enemy in their assembly areas with concentrated fire was always the most effective means to stifle the attack in germ or to weaken it powerfully. This was accomplished that day several times. The Russians seemed to want to play everything at one card. In an ill-considered manner the reserves were advanced deeply disposed in 5 or 6 waves. Our artillery fire produced real hecatombs in them. The Russian command showed a nervous impatience. Towards noon a large piece of trenches was lost; but the remnants of the garrison clung to favorable places in the terrain situated at short distances to the rear.

From my observatory, which offered a very good view, I saw an extraordinary picture. In spite of the well-regulated shortcut fire, more than a hundred Russians managed to break into a trench sector. There they were hidden from our view. I knew that the garrison in that trench was of much smaller strength than the Russians who broke through. Shortly afterwards we could see that here and there, as far as we could make out, rifles were being thrown out of the trenches over the rear parapet. Then we saw numerous Russians approaching that trench, which was as good as dead. The sudden open fire from the trench paralyzed the enemy's advance. Later we learned that the Russians who had broken through immediately surrendered to the garrison. Their rifles were thrown out of the trench. They had to sit at the bottom of the trench and were visibly relieved to have escaped the hell of the fight. There was no commissar among them. In the Rogatschev area it had spread very quickly among the Russians that the Germans did not shoot the prisoners.

The critical situation was not so favorable everywhere. The adversary's pressure reached its culmination in the afternoon. On that day we took prisoners belonging to five Divisions. Trenches were lost; we then proceeded to occupy closing positions, since we could not think of reconquering them. The unit commanders reported that the exhaustion of the troops was increasing and that considerable losses were being experienced. In several sectors of the company only two machine guns could be used.

Throughout the day the thought of retreat came to my mind. It was evident to me that the Division had reached the limit of its strength. On the other hand, the nervousness of the Russian leadership had not escaped me. I also deduced from their manner of conducting the battle that they had not received new forces and were not expecting them either. Naturally, I could not count on a guarantee of the correctness of this conclusion. But in war this is usually the case. In the afternoon I informed the Corps that I did not intend to withdraw the Division that day either. Rarely was it so difficult for me to send a report.

Even when all one's spiritual and intellectual forces are directed toward one goal and one's energies are deployed to the utmost, there are moments in such circumstances when the mind rises above the immediate requirements of the hour for a reflection of a general order.

When during the day I was at my observation post, my thoughts often turned to many problems of life and above all were attracted by the question, "Fate, determination, chance or freedom?" When, in the morning, an orderly officer and a stationman, who were at a short distance from me, were badly wounded by the shells of a grenade, this question arose in my mind, "Why them two and not me?"

And when my gaze wandered over the field of combat, the thought of nature's cold indifference to man would insistently present itself to me. And yet poets have found the most heartfelt words for that nature and

there are few men who do not want to establish an intimate relationship with it.

I saw the combat zone in front of me, framed in an undulating sea of golden grains; houses and whole villages went up in flames; thousands of grenades churned the earth and anxiously sought their victims in the form of men who clung to life with all their might. Human beings were dying every minute. I saw the fading looks, full of infinite despair, in the eyes of the horses that, exhausted by the excessive efforts imposed by the demands of the battle, fell down, never to rise again. And above all this, the sky was full of light, bright, blue, and the sun, as it has been doing for millions of years, was indifferent, as it was also when human suffering appeared in creation. It is a sign of great spiritual energy that men know how to devote so much feeling to this indifferent nature, which knows only itself and its laws.

During the night of the 15th to the 16th we did not rest even for a moment. I spoke at great length with the regimental commanders and found in them the firm confidence of the previous days, although none of them failed to point out the state of their unit and the uncertainty of the following day. That day, awaited with tension, began with artillery fire from the Russians, of extreme intensity. The artillery itself succeeded in silencing several batteries and then concentrated its fire on the most dangerous meeting places. But over the entire battlefield not the slightest movement could be discerned. After an hour the enemy fire began to diminish. It was clear: the Russians were no longer attacking. The battle had ceased.

I blessed the hour when I made the resolution to stay in position, thus avoiding much misfortune. Those fights also confirmed to me an experience I had already gathered in the IGM. All tactical action is not only a struggle of weapons but also a struggle of energies and it is so in large proportions as well as in small. For the driver it is a matter of eliminating all the doubts that are undermining the strength of his will and his energy, doubts that come from the difficulties and the dangers of the situation or come from the opinions of other people expressed in parts and propositions. Naturally, stubbornness should not govern one's thoughts; here, as in general in life, the right appreciation of the measure and the limit is very difficult, but it is also the fundamental thing.

In difficult situations there is an easy tendency to assign to influences on the will from many sources an importance that does not correspond to them, especially when they are directed to the abandonment of a bold thought or to the subtraction of a danger. Herein lies a great threat to success in the struggle of wills. In this struggle it is of decisive importance, first of all, what I would call "the longest breath in the last quarter of an hour." When the struggle has reached its culmination, when that crisis occurs which must lead to the decision, in that last phase, all the influences on the leader are brought to bear with the greatest violence. At that moment, everything depends on maintaining the last firmness with serenity and clear vision of the facts.

After the Russians suspended their large-scale attacks, positional fighting of varying intensity was waged at the front. The units could, at last, be taken out of the positions in turn and brought to the rear to rest. The Division Command was located on the main road leading from Bobruisk to Rogatshev. Bobruisk, located 30 km. west of us, was the first Russian town I saw. It is on the western bank of the Beresina, which is already a mighty river here. The railway bridge and the road bridge had been blown up by the Russians. German sappers had built a wooden bridge for heavy loads. From the river side, the city presents a nice view; the neighborhoods stretching westward reach into woods that resemble parks. Except for a nucleus of solid, relatively large buildings, the houses are small and constructed of wood, and impress for the most part as neglected and poor. The city streets, with the exception of a few, are dirt and in rainy weather traffic is difficult. At the station we saw some large deposits of birch firewood, formed by

meter-long pieces, intended to serve as fuel for locomotives. Bobruisk is a typical small Russian town, as we have later seen it repeated several times.

The entire plain stretching between the large wooded region to the north, the fighting front and the Beresina was covered, on our arrival, by extensive grain fields that were just ripening, in which were scattered some

18. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

potato fields of several hectares in area. The Division was made responsible for the harvest from the front to the vicinity of the Beresina. For this purpose everything had to be improvised, as we were neither prepared for such a task nor organized for it. The Russians, moreover, had withdrawn all their agricultural machinery. In the opinion of our experts, it was very doubtful that the harvest could be raised in a timely manner in this region organized for machine work. During a tour I came one morning to a 10-hectare wheat field. About 20 women and children from a nearby village, who had only sickles, had started cutting. The undertaking seemed almost impossible to me. Two days later I passed by again and saw that the wheat had been cut and the bundles were laid out in a straight line over the wide field. The impression we gathered of the Russian woman's amazing performance gave me pause for thought. By the time we left the region in mid-August, the entire crop of this vast area had been harvested.

In this rich region there are several villages, which are quite distant from each other. The number of inhabitants was much smaller than the fertile soil could support. All the houses were built of wood with thatched roofs. In most localities there was a school building constructed solidly of wood and sometimes of bricks. In many classrooms there was a map of extraordinary magnitude covering Asia, Europe and North Africa. The vast expanse of the Soviet Union, from its western border to the Pacific Ocean, was marked in bright red and the other parts in modest light gray. On that map Europe evidently appeared as an unimportant addition to Asia. I found maps like these in all the schools of the Russian territory through which I passed. I found in the young Russian generation a great self-consciousness and an often haughty pride in the extent and strength of their country. This was the result of education which precisely in that order had a well-defined purpose.

I was especially interested in knowing the spiritual and sentimental state of the Russian people and I tried to deepen it as far as possible. With this object, I spoke in the different Russian regions where we arrived, with several hundred men and women from 15 to 75 years of age, peasants, chiefs of the Kolkhoz, agronomists, industrial workers, engineers, doctors, besides with a priest, as well as with many prisoners, privates, non-commissioned officers, officers and also with some generals. I had as interpreter a very intelligent Baltic young man who responded entirely to my purposes; he had followed in Riga the courses of the German secondary school; later he had obtained the diploma of engineer at the Technical High School of Leningrad; he was fluent in both languages as well as in several Russian dialects.

In the fertile region we were in, it was the external organization of rural activity that especially caught our attention. As soon as the Soviet regime was consolidated, the peasants were forced to transfer their property to the state. They were left only the house and a small piece of land, almost always a home garden or an area of a quarter of a hectare, for their private cultivation and exploitation. The peasant could also keep a cow, a pig and some chickens, but not a horse. Everything in excess of this possession had to be handed over to the State at the same time. The expropriated land and the communal land, which was often quite extensive, of one or several villages were gathered together to form the so-called Koljoz, led by chiefs appointed for this purpose.

The Kolkhoz were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. According to local circumstances, one of these two activities was in the foreground; in most cases, by the way, it was agriculture. Mainly from the expropriated large rural properties, the State Kolkhoz, called Sovkhoz, were formed, which were also devoted to special branches, such as horse, pig or poultry breeding. The staff consisted of the former peasants of that jurisdiction, whose work was paid with goods and partly also with a small amount of money. The payment in goods depended on the yield of the Koljoz harvest, after deduction of what was to be given to the State, and consisted of grain, on average 3 kg. and even kg. per person and daily work done. When a day's work was missed, no payment was made, which put the sick and weak in a bad situation. These were then cared for by the family or relatives, which was contrary to Soviet intentions to weaken family ties; it led, on the contrary, to a stronger cohesion and solidarity of the family.

Kolkhoz resulted in the fact that in Russia there are no peasants in the European sense and only rural workers.

I gained the impression that the Kolkhoz system constitutes a form of organization which is adapted to the intentions of the Soviet, in the foreground of which is the limitation of individual remuneration and the increased production with a maximum utilization of the working capacity of each individual. The yield of production is incomparably higher than under individual ownership. Men and women working in a collective enterprise under supervision achieve astonishing returns. A reward system also offers great incentives. On the other hand, a rational use of agricultural machinery is only possible on large farms. Kolkhoz's system thus enables the Soviet government to make available a considerable number of arms from the rural areas for industry, without harming agriculture and animal husbandry.

Every peasant is conservative and must also be conservative. When we were for a long time in Russian territory during the World War I was able to verify that the Russian peasant possessed this quality to a really extreme extent and that he was contrary to all progress; because of his manifestly passive idiosyncrasy he tended gladly to avoid any situation that required of him a resolution. He also lost many hours of work to the influence of alcohol. In all these respects there is, apart from a few exceptions, an enormous difference between the Russian peasant and the peasant of Central Europe. But also for the Russian peasant the Kolkhoz system must be, in the final analysis, very detrimental in the spiritual and sentimental aspect. By working in a Kolkhoz he loses all interest in the land, he does not practice independent action, and he lets the energy which gives responsibility in life disappear. There can be no doubt that these disadvantages can never be compensated by the advantages of a better organization of production. According to newspaper reports, the Soviet government would have taken away from the rural population also the last remnant of individual economic activity by taking away from them even the home gardens. The peasant must be reduced exclusively to his participation in the work of the collectivity. I spoke with many Russian peasants. The older ones, who still had the memory of private property, were opposed to Kolkhoz; but some of them had already lost their love for the land and did not feel uncomfortable about the fact that a part of their own responsibility had been taken away from them individually. The youth who knew nothing but the Kolkhoz were not unhappy. Only one clear-headed boy told me that it would have to be more beautiful if the property that his father once owned and often showed him belonged exclusively to the family again. Payment in goods was considered sufficient by most of the peasants. Everyone's complaint was that they only received an insufficient amount of money, so that they could buy practically nothing.

3. Russia

The lessons of the war in the East

Moscow or the Ukraine. Advance across the Dnieper

The quiet at the front also gave us the opportunity to meditate on the impressions and lessons of the war gathered so far. These were also the subject of the numerous conversations I had with command officers and unit commanders.

What impressed us all most powerfully was the high degree of Russian military preparedness. It came as a manifest surprise to all, even though it had been generally expected that the Russians had developed their military capacity by all means. In the summer of 1941 they already had some 250 Divisions including the large armored groups and 6 million trained soldiers. It was evident that this degree of personal and material preparation would have been doubled in approximately two years, if they had been able to continue without any disturbance the corresponding works.

We had the impression and the conviction of having broken through, at the last moment, the process of increasing the military potentiality in order to engage the struggle with some prospects of success. Two years later, or perhaps even earlier, it would certainly not have been possible, even with an intensive development of the German rearmament, because the Russians would have gained the upper hand both in the number of men

20. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

and with respect to the war material. It was furthermore evident that in the end a state would inevitably be reached in which a purely defensive struggle against such a superiority would have to present only very small prospects of success for Germany. On the eastern frontier of Germany the space for the conduct of defensive operations would have been of small extent, both in depth and in front.

It would still be necessary to answer the question of whether the Russian military structure had an offensive or defensive character. In any state such a question can only be answered in close connection with the assessment of its policy. In Russia it must always be borne in mind that its leaders represented an ideology whose propagation in the world, also by the use of force, was an openly expressed postulate. Apart from the precarious beginnings of the so-called "Stalin line", the Russians had done absolutely nothing for the passive defense of the territory, even though their western frontier was completely open and the terrain there presented no obstacles to the attacker. Also the situation of a large part of their war industry in the west of the country indicated that they were not counting on an invasion by an attacker.

All this already provided sufficient elements of judgment to have to assign to the military body an offensive character. On the other hand, the Russian policy of the two preceding years left no doubt as to the existence of a powerful expansive intention. We think of the war against Finland, the annexation of the Baltic States in cold form, and the occupation of Bessarabia and Bukovina, all actions which took place after the signing of the German-Russian friendship treaty. All this was culminated by the Russian demand for the occupation of the Dardanelles.

Thus there would not have been many military men on the eastern front who after the revelation of the magnitude of the Russian military organism and considering the ideology and the clear expansive tendency of the Soviet Empire as well as the slim prospects of a defensive against a considerably increased Russian armed force, would not have considered war against Russia justified.

The war against Russia was also to eliminate the danger of a war on two fronts. A Russian attack was to be expected at a time unfavorable to the Reich and favorable to Russia. That time was when the Western powers would be ready in their preparations; this would be in 1943 as was then appreciated. For this reason, 1941 was the last date for the attempt to eliminate the Eastern adversary and to avoid war on two fronts.

The question arises today as to whether attributing an expansive warlike intention to Russia is justified in 1948 more than in 1941, when there is a series of elements of judgment in support of such an intention. After the war many voices were heard formally affirming *ex cathedra* that the Russians would never have gone to war against Germany. The same voices are, however, those who since 1948 have expressed Russia's intention of war against the entire Western world as absolutely probable or, even more so, as certain. Nor does history give the victor a superior judgment in assessing a situation.

In 1941 it was evident to us that the war against Russia, already by its undeniable purpose of avoiding war on two fronts, was also a legitimate preventive war. The preconditions for qualifying a war as "preventive" were fulfilled, according to the dominant opinions of that time, when a State counts on the intention of attack of another State and recognizes in it an immediate danger or a threat in the near future; also when a war could not be avoided and an expectation of the attack of the other increased the danger in such a way that success then appeared out of the question or at least very doubtful.

We were well aware of the problem of preventive war. There was never an international body that could have determined whether there had really been an imminent danger. The competence for such a determination then rested exclusively with national sovereignty. It seemed to us that such a danger clearly existed.

When in the second half of 1944 I was in command in Lapland (Northern Finland), I had at my disposal the bookstores of Helsinki and Stockholm, which were not isolated from the world market. There I got my hands on the book by the British jurist Brierly, *The Law of Nations*, 1942. I remembered the conversations held on the resolution of the war against Russia when I read the sentence there:

"A State may, as an isolated man, defend itself against an attack, whether it actually takes place or only threatens. The principle of self-defense is self-evident, even if its application to special cases may often be

difficult."

It is clear that applied to the State, self-defense can also be effected through attack.

In the first half of August a momentous decision was taken which decisively influenced the further course of the war. While Army Group "South" was on the Middle and Lower Dnieper in heavy fighting with the focus on the Kiev area, Army Group "Center" had reached with its mass some 200 km beyond the Upper Dnieper to the east, far beyond Smolensk and Roslavl.

According to Hitler's original plan, once the Smolensk area had been reached, the center of the army was to be halted; its mass, however, was to be used for the conquest of the Ukraine and the Crimea. It was hoped that there, too, particularly numerous enemy forces would be found there and that by beating them rich areas would be conquered which were considered necessary for the continuation of the war. This plan was intensely opposed by the senior army chiefs and the General Staff. They held the viewpoint of advancing with a center of gravity on Moscow and, in the first place, seizing this region of extraordinary political importance and, above all, a center of communications. In the advance on Moscow it was hoped to find the main forces of the enemy. The conduct of the struggle in Southern Russia would then be considerably relieved.

When the Army Group "Center" reached the region east of Smolensk and Roslavl and was forced to a long halt for supply reasons, the internal struggle for the advance to Moscow, which was less than 300 km away, began again. As the Russians had "caught" the middle Dnieper with the center of gravity in Kiev and the wide advance of the Army Group "Center" on the other side of the upper Dnieper, a situation had been created which, by a conversion of this Army Group to the south, made it possible to hope for a decisive success against the strong Russian front on the Dnieper and then for the conquest of the Ukraine.

Given the rigidity of the Russian leadership, it was this unique prospect of a great success that surely contributed to Hitler's refusal to let himself deviate from his original plan. Consequently, the advance on Moscow was not made. I want to go ahead and express that important parts of the Army Group "Center", among them almost all the armored groupings, began to turn southward from August 15. The great "pocket" of Kiev was reached, in which the huge number of 600,000 Russians was taken prisoners and led to the possession of the Ukraine. The offensive on Moscow following the operation against Kiev suffered, for the latter, a delay of six weeks; later, shortly after its initiation, it suffered a further delay due to the autumn mud period, so that it was overtaken by winter. The Russians, on their part, gained precious time to prepare their countermeasures.

If the advance on Moscow had been made in August, it would surely have been successful. It would have achieved not only a great psychological success, but also that the most important railway center of European Russia would have fallen to the Germans. It was not possible, however, to count on an elimination of the Russian forces in the Ukraine and southern Russia with the German forces available there, nor on achieving a great gain of space in the Ukraine.

Had the existing relations between the forces of the two sides been maintained, there would have been at the beginning of the winter the following picture: Army Group "Center" would have been in a wide space around Moscow; Army Group "South" would still have been far behind in southern Russia, for the major impetus for its wide gain of ground was, incidentally, the success in the battle of the Kiev pocket, which would not have been achieved. Between the two groups of Armies there would have been (always assuming that the existing relationship between the forces had been preserved) an enormous clearing for the closing of which no troops would have been available. But in reality, as we will see later, even the small gaps at the front, resulting from the lack of forces, were precisely one of the main causes of the crisis of the winter battle of 1941-42.

The Russian counteroffensive would not have failed to take place. Its organization would hardly have been disturbed by a successful offensive against the Moscow area. In any case the Russian losses by such an offensive would not have been nearly as great as in the battle of Kiev. The Russian counteroffensive would have collided with the Army Group "Center", frontally from the east and on the southern flank, open in a depth of hundreds of kilometers and only insufficiently protected.

If in retrospect we bear in mind the actual course of the winter battle and especially the influence of cold and

22. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

snow as well as the importance of the clearings on the front, we come to the conclusion that the Russian counteroffensive would have led to the annihilation of the Army Group "Center".

The advance on Moscow, renouncing the idea of the conquest of the Ukraine and the Kiev pocket, which to that effect was advantageously offered, would only have been justified if it had been possible to count on the intervention of new forces reaching dozens of Divisions until the arrival of winter. For this not even the initial measures had been adopted. In such circumstances it must necessarily be deduced, on the basis of the experiences of the effective course of events,

that an advance on Moscow without a prior or simultaneous conquest of the Ukraine and the elimination of the enemy forces located there would have led to the annihilation of a large part of the German army in the winter of 1941-42.

On August 12, 1941 I received the order to start the march on August 16 with the Division, within the framework of the offensive to be resumed in a few days to repulse the enemy in front of Rogatshev and to advance across the Dnieper. That city lies immediately north of the mouth of the Druth into the Dnieper, so that on the east, south and north it is surrounded by both watercourses. The western bank of both rivers is very high, so that we could not see them from our observatory. Nothing could be seen of the city other than the roofs of some high buildings.

In the first battles with the German armored groups during the first half of July, the Russians had destroyed the large bridge over the Druth leading to Rogatshev and the one from the city leading to the eastern bank of the Dnieper, and replaced them later with raft bridges. A few kilometers north of the city they had laid a pontoon bridge over the Druth. As the center of gravity of the attack I chose the strip immediately south of the great road with the first objective of seizing the Rogatshev bridges as unscathed as possible. The attack was to be made across both rivers and the town, situated between them, built on a long blade. The higher authorities wanted the attack to be carried out south of the city across the Dnieper, which was considerably wider there, but had only one continuous course, in order to avoid both the city of Rogatshev and a double river crossing; but such a solution had to be discarded, as the eastern bank of the river was very swampy there; moreover, in that area not even a country road led to the river and there was none on the eastern bank either.

Preparations were made without attracting attention. A motorized grouping was formed consisting of fighter-tanks, sappers and parts of the scouting detachment, which as soon as the enemy position was broken through was to advance to the bridges and seize them. To support the attack we were promised the collaboration of a squadron of dive-bombing planes. Because in the early morning hours there was usually fog from the Dnieper that covered the terrain of the positions, I set 06:00 for the initiation of the attack, in consideration of the airmen. The armies to the northeast of us, which were very much staggered to the vanguard, started the above-mentioned offensive to the south on August 15, that is, one day before the Division's attack. The Higher Command appreciated that the offensive started far to the east should exert an influence on the enemy forces west of Rogatshev and that this would facilitate our task, which would have to be extraordinarily difficult if the enemy resisted firmly.

In the early morning of August 16 I moved to my forward fighting position located a short distance from the attacking regimental fighting position in the center of gravity, immediately south of the road to Rogatshev. A dense white fog still covered the area. Although it was the middle of summer, the weather was very cool. The fiery globe of the sun was rising magnificently above the horizon and the fog was gradually clearing. The whole area was quiet, only interrupted by isolated gunshots. However, there was a feeling of great tension everywhere. Even the landscape to which we had become accustomed and of which we knew every tree, every house and every ruin, seemed to be shrouded in solemn gravity.

We, too, were overcome by a deep emotion. Before each attack we carried out, I checked the existence of this feeling in myself and in all the men with whom I had been involved.

was in contact. When he had to lead an attack, this way of fighting always aroused the thought of destiny, which is connected with all actions in war. And this thought applied not only to the course of the impending fight but also to his own destiny and that of the countless combatants who here staked their lives. The greater the joy and relief, the more quickly an attack, as would be the case here on the Dnieper, would lead to a quick success and cost only very small losses.

A distant noise of engines announced the approach of the airmen. At 06:00 o'clock they were over the enemy position. We watched as they swooped down on their targets and immediately took off again in vertical flight. Shortly afterwards the gray-brown clouds, produced by the explosion of their heavy bombs, spread upward like mushrooms. Under the protection of a brief burst of fire from all the artillery tubes and heavy infantry guns, the sharpshooters approached within assault range and a short time later burst into the enemy positions. Here it came almost everywhere only to brief fights. The Russians had withdrawn most of their forces to the eastern margin. Although we had counted on this attitude in view of the general situation, we naturally had to make all preparations on the assumption of strong resistance. Already in the IGM the Russians had proved to be masters at withdrawing troops without attracting attention.

While still fighting at isolated points deep in the enemy position, the motorized grouping began its advance and rushed to the bridges after having waited only for the rapid elimination of the mines on the road in the vicinity of the Russian position. We managed to take both bridges unscathed, after a Russian destruction platoon, which on the eastern bank was just about to blow up the Dnieper bridge, was dispersed by machine-gun fire. I tried together with some officers of my command to reach the bridges as soon as possible. When from a country road we turned onto the highway, we saw a horse-drawn vehicle on the left. Because of the danger of mines, we followed exactly the track left by the motorized group, which had passed this way a short time before and whose vehicles, as we could clearly see, carefully followed the track of the one in the lead. I later learned that the hypo-mobile vehicle had hit a mine, that the driver, the passenger and the two horses were seriously injured and that the vehicle was wrecked. Traveling over a mined road is one of the most unpleasant stresses of war. Several times more I made trips of this kind, in incomparably more difficult circumstances, in Russia and in the Balkans.

We pass a few clusters of destroyed houses before reaching the western bank of the Druth. Steeply, like a wall, the Loess bank, about 20 meters high, falls into the river. In front, on a small plateau on the blade was Rogatshev, the most beautifully scenic town I have seen in Russia. Then I passed for the first time over a raft bridge. Such bridges consist of several spans firmly connected to each other, each of them consisting of several successive layers of thick tree trunks, arranged perpendicularly. A floor of planks formed the deck of the bridge. As is natural, the whole construction flexes to the extent of the sag imposed by the load; but it does not represent an inconvenience. Through this bridge we also passed our howitzers and heavy cannons.

Apart from a few houses, the beautiful town of Rogatshev, with its solid masonry buildings, was completely burned down. The entire population had fled. Inhabitants of the villages on the eastern bank of the Dnieper later reported that the Russians set fire to the town; they also destroyed the large road bridges leading over the rivers as soon as the danger arose that the German armored units might force their way across them.

From the southern edge of the city, where the blade becomes narrower and narrower and drops steeply as if it were the prow of a ship, towards the rivers that join there, there is a unique view. To the east stretches the immeasurable wooded area to which the Russians had retreated; to the west the dominating steep ravine that intercepts the view; to the south the view wanders over the region of the Dnieper that flows with majestic calm and after receiving the Druth becomes a mighty river. Its flat and marshy eastern bank was covered by wide reeds. All the melancholy of the great eastern rivers was in that picture. Even when the view reached far to the west, no trace of human life could be seen. The short stretch of road and railroad that soon disappeared into the forest further increased the infinite isolation that was evident throughout. But also this landscape, like so many others in Russia, aroused the impression of the gigantic. The thought of conquering Russia and dominating it

24. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

seemed to me several times to be a mistake. In the theaters of war in Central and Western Europe with their confined spaces and dense communication networks, the conquest of territory goes hand in hand with the defeat of the enemy. The enemy falls like a ripe fruit into the hands of the victor in the struggle. In Russia, victory in the struggle does not bring mastery of the territory. On the contrary, it poses special and difficult problems.

From Rogatshev the great road led eastward and at the entrance to the forest there was, as the letter indicated, a road to the southeast. The enemy in his retreat could not have used the road, because further east it had already been crossed by forces of Army Group "Center". For that cause I ordered the scouting detachment to advance along that road to the southeast. About 15 km south of us the enemy still held their old positions on the western bank of the Dnieper. The Russians were trying to establish a rear position with a northern front, a position which only at nightfall could be roughly determined by the scouting detachment; that position had a link with their position on the Dnieper where the high forest followed an undulating area of dunes, covered with a lot of material. At night most of the Division was ready in front of that rear position to attack it in the early morning of August 17. But the enemy forces withdrew during the darkness. The strong rear guards surrendered after a short fight.

We continued our advance southeastward to the railroad line leading east from Slobin, where about noon we received the order to halt. During that day we had no air scouting, as on the previous day. Nor did any Russian aviator appear.

Shortly after we had passed the precariously arranged Russian position we were presented with an impressive picture. On the road lay, in column of march, heavy Russian motorized batteries, one after the other; we counted about fifteen. All the pieces and tractors were unscathed. The energetic attack of the scouting detachment on the Russian rear position must have caused a panic in the drivers and service and induced them to flee. We had here, no doubt, the mass of that heavy artillery grouping which gave us so much to do in the Rogatshev area. This considerable booty meant for the Division a well-deserved triumph. Since the initiation of our attack the day before, we took more than 15,000 prisoners, especially in the forests east of the Dnieper and, in addition to the aforementioned heavy batteries, we took some 40 pieces, about 100 trucks and tractors and more than 1,000 horses. In these battles the flag of the 343rd Rifle Regiment was also taken, which bore a dedication from Marshal Timoshenko.

I spoke with several of the many prisoners. The officers and troops again agreed on the animosity against the commissars. The commissars were found in all units, from the companies up. In the companies they were called politruk. One soldier related to me that in one of the attacks in the month

In July, the politruk of his company shot from behind and from safe cover his neighbor on the right for not advancing fast enough. Unit commanders complained about the intervention of the commissars in their powers of command. Every order had to have the concurrence of the respective commissary. A major expressed to me that in the officer corps the animosity of Marshal Timoshenko against the commissars was known; the Marshal was trying hard to have their powers reduced. From all the reports I gathered, however, the impression that the commissars uncompromisingly enforced compliance with orders and contributed to the maintenance of discipline in a much more draconian manner than the normal chief. The problem of the commissars always presented itself to me anew. For the Russian soldier it seemed to be at the center of his military life.

There was an order from Hitler that prisoner commissars were to be shot. The German interpretation of the order regarding commissars at that time was based on the fact that the Hague Land Warfare Regulations only protected in war those persons (military and accompanying army personnel) who were subordinate to a military commander in the field. However, the commissars were not subordinate to a military commander in the field, but had their own hierarchy, parallel to the military hierarchy, which in none of its grades was subordinate to a military commander in the field; on the contrary, surrounding the military hierarchy, they depended on a central authority in Moscow. For this reason, the commissars were not recognized either as military or as accompanying army personnel. Since they also took part in the fighting, they were considered to be snipers.

And they were outside the law.

The units of the Division, by the way, never applied this order. Partly because it was repugnant to them, partly because I do not remember any case of a commissar being taken prisoner in the Division. As a rule, they knew how to get to safety in a timely manner or to submerge themselves in the mass of prisoners.

4. Russia

A Bolshevik teacher. On the dirt roads to Desna.

Initiation of the October struggles.

The Division, which had been in combat without interruption for a month, was granted a few days of rest. Following the area of forests and dunes, on both sides of the road, there was a region of fertile land suitable for agriculture where cereals had been sown; the harvest had not yet been raised. The grain was already ripe. The Kolkhoz chiefs had fled. I left the population to harvest as much as they could for their own consumption. This was only half done as the inhabitants were suspicious and fearful of each other.

Here, too, the small villages produced an impression of poverty and neglect. The inhabitants had an extraordinarily low standard of living. In Slobin there was one store where there was something to buy, such as cotton goods and nails. The peasants had little money and the prices were extremely high. Their clothing was, as in most of Russia, very primitive. The linen for their clothing was made of linen, which they wove by hand. In the winter they wore over their blouse a sheepskin tanned in the house. I was shown a house in the construction of which not a nail or piece of metal had been used. Even the hinges of the doors and windows were made of pure wood. In this house, the only metal object was a dented frying pan. Even the axles of many vehicles were made only of wood.

The most interesting person I had met so far in Russia was the teacher in the town where we were staying. Up to that time all the teachers had fled. He was about 35 years of age, had a wife and two children and occupied a two-room house, one of which also served as a kitchen. I told him that I was interested in knowing his opinions on various questions and that he could express them freely and without worry, without any fear of harming himself. In spite of this he showed great reserve at first and always maintained a distrustful prudence. Although he was intelligent and had worked hard at his own preparation he had not even a rough idea of life outside Russia. He knew the time of the Tsars only through the Bolshevik bibliography; but he had also read Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Gorky, and in their books he had found confirmation of the social deficiencies and the boundless corruption of the previous epoch, asserted by the Bolsheviks. He considered the Western world to be very backward because all the deficiencies which characterized the time of the tsars still existed there. He was firmly convinced that Bolshevism had put an end to them all and that the present social order in which the Russian people lived was the best. For the peoples of the West he had no ill will but the typical Russian compassion. With this orientation he also educated the youth. He considered that a special progress that Bolshevism had brought to the Russian people was the creation of schools in almost all the large villages, with which illiteracy disappeared in Russia, whereas before there were few peasants who knew how to read and write.

He answered in the affirmative and categorically my question as to whether or not the population was happy, adding that there was some discontent over the lack of certain necessary items. People were insistently asking for plates, tableware, frying pans and glasses, such as those seen in the city, as well as clothing, needles, scissors and other utensils. Older people's accounts of certain pleasant aspects of life in earlier times also sometimes contributed to discontent. In their opinion, if the war had not come, such failings would also have been remedied.

Finally, I asked him why one rarely saw flowers in a garden and never in a house. He told me that this was because everyone avoided standing out in some aspect from the others. The next day I wanted to continue this conversation but the teacher had disappeared without a trace. It was certainly surprising that this intelligent person had remained at his post while all the other teachers had fled. That is why our security service took an interest in him, which alerted him.

In the few days of rest the units recovered quite a bit. It was a painful fact that the ranks had been thinned considerably by the attacks and especially by the defensive fights of several weeks' duration. Contrary to the Russians, we did not receive replacement personnel. The first replacement battalion arrived only in the following spring. Up to that time, only about 300 sick and wounded men had rejoined the division. They were highly appreciated by the units because they had already fought in their ranks and were experienced soldiers.

After a few days, around August 22, the march eastward was resumed. To the south was in full swing the gigantic Kiev pocket in which 600,000 Russians were finally taken prisoner. We ourselves had no enemy at the front.

The march continued for several days through an uncovered and fertile region devoted to agriculture that stretched seemingly without end and that at the end of a day presented itself in the same form before us. Here the crop had already been raised almost in its entirety. When we again had a day's rest, it rained for several hours. Rain in Russia works in a depressing and disconsolate way. We were forced to spend the day in a small peasant's house, full of bedbugs; neither did the units leave their quarters. Every step outdoors made the foot sink to the ankle in the soggy mud of the earth.

The dirt road that had been assigned to us to continue the march the next day was of analogous characteristic. Since Rogatshev we had not seen a firm road. The march on the muddy road was very tiring for the personnel and the cattle. Great difficulties were caused that day by the Shosh Pass in the Tschetschersk area. This creek, about 50 meters wide, was deeply embanked. The sappers had built a bridge of circumstance and had constructed access ramps in both ravines, ramps whose gradients would have created no difficulties for vehicles in dry weather, but on wet ground the wheels were so deeply wedged that in spite of continually shoveling out the soft mud that was forming, only very few vehicles could climb the ramp on the other side with their own traction. On the other side, reserve shots and tractors were used. This small obstacle gave us a foretaste of the difficulties to be expected from the Russian soil in rainy weather.

Shortly before the village of Chotinsk there was a large board by the roadside on which the number 1,000 had been painted. It had been placed by the vanguard and was a reminder that the Division, from its concentration area in the Bug to that point had marched 1,000 km. This was an impressive amount; it clearly expressed the physical exertion of the troops on foot. I could also observe how this amount aroused pride and joy in the men.

Later, and more and more frequently, the terrain was covered by small forests; later we entered a wooded area through which we marched for almost a whole day. When we again came out into open country, we found ourselves on the broad bank of the Desna, the third of Russia's rivers.

The Desna, like the Beresina, is part of the broad Dnieper basin. In the area where we were the Desna was a narrow and insignificant watercourse; at its mouth on the Dnieper, north of Kiev, it had already become a mighty river. On the eastern bank of

its middle course is one of the most extensive continuous wooded regions of European Russia.

From the Dnieper to the Desna we had traveled 240 km. In the first week of September we again made contact with the enemy, after quite a long time. The Russians had established themselves in the hilly terrain on the western bank of the Desna. The Division took over a security sector about 50 km wide, after having been in reserve for some time. Such a large extension was possible because the Russians were at that time very weak and occupied fronts of a similar width. Their losses in the pocket battles, the last at Kiev, were enormous and they had not yet been able to make up for them.

It could be seen that the most critical period of the war was now coming for the Russians. They could not yet replace their considerable losses in men and material. Our numerous forces concentrated in the Kiev area, after the termination of the pocket, arrived towards the end of September at Desna. It was now intended to continue the offensive with the Moscow objective, which had been abandoned in mid-August in order to commit the

28. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

mass of the forces to the battle of Kiev earlier. Later it gave us much food for thought that the offensive against Moscow launched at the beginning of October was carried out under conditions which in no way guaranteed success.

The shock power of the German army as a whole was undoubtedly superior to that of the Russians, as the following period also showed. But nothing was done by the German supreme leadership in order at least to conserve this shock power; still less was done to increase it in consideration of the Russian counter-measures which were to be expected with all certainty. While the Russians were working feverishly on the reorganization of their shattered groupings and the creation of new ones, the German units did not even receive replacement personnel which would have compensated totally or at least partially for the losses suffered since the beginning of the war. As there were always new losses, albeit in smaller numbers, the combat strength of the units was increasingly reduced. Thus the Russians were able to achieve a clear superiority by the beginning of December. The strength of the German army continued to be unperturbedly sucked away by all those authorities who preferably used the human potential in the wrong direction, which essentially contributed to the loss of the war.

At that time only scanty news filtered through to the front about the power struggle and the intrigues that were being waged in the Reich over military-age personnel and which, in the final analysis, led to the weakening of the army. Göring was already keeping hundreds of thousands of the best men in the Luftwaffe without really needing them. Himmler was expanding his powerful and numerous organization without taking into account the number of men it required. The state administration, especially the organs for the direction of the economy, was overstaffed, as were the offices of numerous industries, and they continued to be so. As they all proceeded, so did the Party organs which were not inferior in personnel to those bureaucratic organs. Most of these bodies employed a large number of the nation's personnel, especially in the first two years of the war, that is to say, in the decisive period. It is understandable that this left very few men to reinforce the army.

In the last weeks of September 1941 we were certain that the offensive would be resumed shortly. The disappointment of the units, especially the infantry and the sappers, was great when they did not receive the replacements they had been expecting for a long time. At the end of September the greatly extended division was partially relieved by units of the 2nd Army coming from the south and occupied a narrower strip near the Desna, south of Roslavl. The Division came under the 2nd Army and was now on its left wing. On our left followed the XIII Army Corps, belonging to the 4th Army.

In the Division's new strip the Russian positions were on the eastern bank of the river. During the fighting in August the Russians had initially intended to hold the very dominant western bank; before their evacuation they heavily mined the whole area. As our forces had left only weak positions in that area at the time, most of these mines had not yet been lifted. For this reason, the Division's preparation strips for the attack and the access roads had to be cleared of mines. Unfortunately, in the course of occupying the aprons, there were some casualties due to the explosion of some of them.

We found an excellent observatory, although on the slope that descended towards the enemy. At a good depth runs the Desna, which is only 50 meters wide there. Close to the river were the first Russian positions, which, due to the general situation, could only constitute cover for security fractions. Approximately in the first third of the eastern bank, which slopes gently upwards, was the real Russian position. On this bare ground, with grain fields already cut down, there were several small villages. The attack, which after passing the river was to be made uphill, would have to be quite difficult; nevertheless a zone to be followed by the center of gravity was very clearly manifested in the terrain, which took advantage of several ravines, covered with bushes, ascending in the direction of the attack. The first target of the attack could only be the high ridge, where the bare ground ended and the high forest began; it was, however, 10 km away.

The day before the attack, while reconnoitering the observatory and shortly after passing the height, we came to a fork in the road where there were two German tanks that had been hit by mines during the fighting in August. Here, too, we followed the track of the vehicle that had preceded us, as the terrain was unsafe. When the next day, the day of the attack, we were moving at dawn to the observation post at the fork in the road we

saw a wrecked ammunition wagon which had evidently lost the track the day before and hit a mine. That road had been checked, no doubt, for mines; but the locating instrument had not indicated the presence of that mine because of the mass of iron made up by those two tanks.

The day of attack was October 2. Wet and cold weather prevailed; the sun did not show itself during the whole day. The Russian security positions immediately adjacent to the Desna were soon conquered. The real resistance was encountered, as already expected, further east, on the slope. In spite of the enemy fire the sappers succeeded in the morning in completing the laying of a war bridge so that a part of the artillery and heavy infantry guns could soon be brought to the other bank. The mass of the infantry transshipped in dinghies and quickly improvised rafts. By noon the enemy's main positions and the area of footholds behind them had also been taken. The retreat up the upward slope during the day was very difficult for the enemy and caused him many losses; he also did not hold the height but disappeared in the large wooded area. Some pieces fell into our possession. Forward troops followed the enemy; outposts were established several miles into the woods.

The Division went to rest in the villages of that area. At the edge of the forest there was a small village, where the command was lodged in the afternoon. It took several hours to clean the house. During that time we sat around a small fire at the edge of the forest; the coolness of autumn was already making itself uncomfortably felt. When I thought of our excited nerves, the weary attention and intense activity during the morning and the hours that followed, and now saw the relief and unconcern that was reflected in all the faces, one could believe that these were other men. Always again the gaze was directed to the slope down to the Desna for which they had recently fought fiercely. It was

now calm and peaceful. Only here and there the smoldering remains of houses burned by artillery fire revealed what had happened during the day. Over the river there was a light mist and on the other side the hills from which we had come were vanishing in the haze of the unseasonable day. Behind us, on the other hand, stretched the great forest that we had seen only as a dark strip on the horizon for two days. Its majestic trees, with thick trunks, several centuries old, impressed us as if they were an image of the powerful force of untamed nature. Once again we found ourselves in front of a powerful, primitive and virginal landscape, in which a fierce enemy had settled, leaving us no other choice but to finish them both off.

The mysterious that is in life and in the murmurs of our home forests expands in the Russian forests to the mystical. The mysterious awakens, with its emotion, also promising feelings of happiness. The mystical always tends to the serious, to the deep and reflective; it is from there that the hidden weaving of destiny is heard.

5. Russia

Forest, lake and Blüthner piano.

The Division reaches Suchinitschi.

We continued the next day along two paths through the forest. Towards noon the right column collided with the enemy who occupied a position taking advantage of large clearings in the woods. Two regiments attacked; but it was soon recognized that the enemy must be quite strong. They were unable to break through in any part and even the reserve collided against a closed front. The left column, which halted at the sound of fighting, was posted to make a flank attack. In this way the decision of that combat was achieved, which took place at dusk. The enemy retreated to the south, possibly in front of our neighbor's front on the right.

Forest fighting is one of the most difficult kinds of combat. In the war of movement one almost always operates in an atmosphere of uncertainty. It is rarely possible to recognize the adversary and to determine his strength, his device and his position; the close cooperation of artillery in combat is not possible. The effectiveness of heavy infantry weapons is also reduced. This limited effectiveness of the weapons makes the numerical superiority especially felt. Naturally, surprise finds a wide field of action. Thus the intervention of the left column of the Division meant a surprise for the Russians who were not in conditions to counteract it.

Our neighbors on the right were still so far behind that since the Desna Pass we had no link with them. We established it again only after a few weeks when operations came to a standstill. With our neighbor on the left, who was progressing as well as we were, we had only occasional liaison. It was too distant and separated from us by impassable forests. The relation of strength and space was unfavorable. It was justified, however, because the enemy was still very weak and the German command, quite rightly, did not count on decisive fighting in the large wooded areas. Unfortunately, this ratio changed only to a very small extent, as no new forces were employed on the German side and the fighting power of the units was not increased by replacements.

On October 3 we reached in the late afternoon, shortly after the battle in the forest, the large and picturesque village of Bytosch, which lies on the shore of a small lake. The large church had been converted to serve as a cinema and made as sad an impression as an uprooted man. We had arrived in a region of extraordinary abundance of water in which to the north and east large areas of fertile agricultural land had been taken from the forest; to the south huge wooded areas extended far beyond Bryansk, situated about 100 km. away. This was the largest region of continuous forest I found in Russia. Its magnificent foliage and coniferous trees grew out of the damp earth with an exuberance that is hard to imagine. Here one could clearly see the powerful creative force possessed by the fertile soil.

The next day the Division marched in a column through the virgin forest, on the only available extremely poor and often barely marked road. When in the afternoon we again set foot in an agricultural area we breathed as if liberated. We had reached the basin of the Bolva, a river that ran transversely with respect to our direction of march; there, because of an artificial dam, it formed a narrow lake about 10 km long. The Russians had blown up the embankment of the dike. The land to the south of the lake was flooded to a width of several ki.

We were unable to cross it. We therefore turned north in order to use the bridge shown on the charts. Again we had only a barely discernible track across the fields. It was fortunate that the weather was beautiful that day. However, this march was exceptionally heavy for us. But if I asked the soldiers here and there if they were tired, they all answered in the negative, shaking their heads and laughing. The horses caused me great concern.

The bridge was unscathed. We reached the large town-like village of Ljudinovo on the eastern bank, where we stayed. Almost the entire population had fled and only a few inhabitants remained hidden in the houses. I lived in the abandoned house of a doctor, simply furnished in an old style, but pleasantly impressive for its cleanliness. On the floor there was a linoleum carpet and on the dining room table an oilcloth and surrounding it

some chairs with pressed artificial leather fastened with large brass nails; there were also hanging lamps with ornaments and on the walls colored reproductions. These were remnants of the manner of furnishing the dwellings of the petty bourgeoisie which had long been antiquated in Europe, and constituted one of the finest installations I have seen in Russia. An enigma in the midst of these primitive objects was an old Blüthner piano, whose exterior had suffered much, but which had retained its sound and was perfectly in tune.

In the last few weeks we had changed our base almost daily. I always lived in a peasant's house or a schoolhouse. All these dwellings were painted in a uniform color and none of them impressed me too much. Here, on the other hand, I had the distinct feeling of having entered an individual environment, the special character of which impressed me as something strange and hostile. I felt something unnatural while living in that house, where every object awakened in me the thought of unknown people and their lives, a thought that always mingled with that of my own life.

In the evening we sat on the shore of the lake until it got dark. The fields stretching out of sight in the distance reached down to the water's edge. The blasting of the embankment had not yet made itself felt in the height of the water level, which lay mirror-smooth in front of us. The setting sun traced, as if with a ruler, a strip of gold and red across the water. A deep silence reigned. A last bird flew to its distant nest. Here the evening ringing of the bells, to which we are accustomed at that hour in our villages, was missing. Only once the silence was interrupted by the sound of wheels and horses' footsteps: it was a delayed battery hurrying to reach its lodgings.

The scenery of that day was quite different from that of the previous day. When one marches in such close contact with nature through the immeasurable expanses of Russia one finds that the statement that the Russian landscape is monotonous is not accurate. It certainly lacks intimacy; nor does it present rapidly changing pictures. It is rather a creation formed in broad strokes that we must interpret with its own scales. Rarely does it present, in small sections, a picture of charm or grace; it works almost always in grandiose form. In Europe only the great fjords of Norway and the virgin forests of Lapland are capable of awakening such an impression; everything else, even the high mountain world of the Alps, makes its limits felt too much.

The Division remained in the Ljudinovo area for two days. In the southeast, about 30 km away from our most advanced security fractions, the railroad was transporting materials evacuated by the Russians from the Bryansk region via Suchinitschi. It was necessary to make an attempt to disrupt this movement. A destruction patrol under the command of a 1st sergeant headed in a truck captured from the Russians, through an unexplored area, in the direction of a small station. It passed unmolested through a locality occupied by the Russians. The station was not protected. There stood a long train with the locomotive under steam. The patrol placed the loads on the locomotive and in the first car. A man who, during this activity, called out to one of the sappers, had to be killed by pistol shot. Shortly thereafter the patrol was withdrawn and the blasting was carried out. It turned out that the train was an ammunition train. The destruction patrol returned without loss. The few words of this account might too easily produce the impression that this action was something very simple. The description of all the details would demand several pages. In it would be seen all the difficulties they had to overcome and especially the good dose of energy and mastery of the nerves of each of the men.

About 30 km. to the south was the town of Shisdra. There was the largest of the bridges on the road leading to the completely open flank; it was therefore very important to blow up this bridge. It was also of interest to explore in that area. For both purposes, the morning after our arrival in Ljudinovo, a strong detachment of infantry and tank destroyers and a destruction patrol went forward by truck to Shisdra. They found no enemy, even in Shisdra, and returned after the blowing up of the bridge. These were all improvised units that would have certainly failed if they had hit a relatively strong enemy. When the Division marched on the free wing or when it had to accomplish an independent mission in a wide space, it always felt the lack of fast units. While foot troops are indispensable for battle, especially in Russia, they are not suitable for dominating large spaces.

The 2nd Army, which was still far behind in the large forests, was at that time about to gradually move southward to form a pocket in the Bryansk area. The southern arm of this pincer was the 2nd Armored Army.

32. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

The 52nd Infantry Division, far forward to the east, was now transferred to the 4th Army and continued the movement on its right wing. I had to provisionally leave an infantry regiment and an artillery group in the 2nd Army wing. I saw these units again only after a month.

In the next two days we did not collide with the enemy. The scouting detachment had contact only with enemy patrols. The area continued to have abundant water, with a high water table. The march along the country roads was greatly favored by the good weather. With rain we would not have been able to make even half of the distance covered. The whole of October 6 went through a high, swampy forest; we spent the night in a poor little village on the edge of the forest. There I met the only priest I spoke to in Russia. He came from Western Russia and when the Russians evacuated part of the population eastward in the face of advancing German forces, he was left seriously ill in that locality. In a conversation he related in great detail how the position of the Soviets with regard to religion and the church was changing. After initial persecutions, there was a period of greater tolerance, sometimes even support for the church. This was followed by a new epoch of persecutions, in which thousands of priests were deported to Siberia. This persecution stopped, it is true, in the last period before the war; but at the beginning of the war the situation had not yet been clarified in any way. He was of the opinion that it would be easier for the Soviet State to tolerate, among all religions, precisely the Greek Orthodox one, and that it would always be to its advantage to encourage this religion.

In all the time of its existence, the Greek Orthodox Church had never asked to be equalized with the State and even less to be placed above it; it always recognized the authority of the State and supported it in every way. Even over its believers it did not exercise any spiritual dominion because, contrary to other great churches, it has no dogmas. Orthodox religion is a purely sentimental religion, while in other cults intelligence plays a great role. In this respect he drew interesting parallels which should demonstrate how easy it is to unite the Greek Orthodox religion precisely with the principles of a totalitarian state.

Even in the time of autocratic tsarism there never existed those differences that in other nations were repeated, through the centuries, between the power of the State and other religions. The Russian people suffered greatly from the lack of consolation and exhortation which are found in religion and which cannot be replaced by any ideology. It seemed to me that in expressing his idiosyncrasies, he at first felt self-conscious before me and later became quite suspicious. The position and attitude of certain National Socialist circles towards religion would have come to his knowledge distorted; he asked me whether in Germany, along with other churches, the great cathedrals had also been destroyed by the authority of the State.

On the morning of the 7th we reached a dry region somewhat higher up. The forest had been left behind and we were marching through agricultural land, the extent of which seemed unlimited. In the afternoon we reached, with the vanguard and the first echelon of the Division Command, the small town of Suchinitschi, picturesquely situated on a hill and presenting a fairly appreciable number of well-constructed buildings of masonry and reinforced concrete. Good accommodations would be well appreciated by the Command and the units, for up to that time, with few exceptions, we had found only isolated, very poor villages. On the northern edge of the village, the Briansk-Kaluga single-track railroad passed through a long clearing. The station was also located there. In all the agricultural regions of Russia I had encountered large numbers of crows, but never so many as on the march to Suchinitschi. Nowhere is this bird so widespread as in Russia; nowhere are there also so many rats as in this country. When one rides through the fields on horseback, after the harvest has been raised, one has the impression that the whole ground is in motion. An agronomist, agricultural adviser to the Kolkhoz, told me that one-fifth of the grain harvest is lost to rats. The fight against rats was until then almost fruitless. The greatest ally in this fight were the crows, which for that reason were not persecuted. In front of Suchinitschi I saw flocks of 6,000 birds of this species.

We had reached the small town, a short distance behind the mining detachment, when a powerful explosion shook the earth. Shortly afterwards flames of fire were seen rising skyward from the station area and then the explosion of loose grenades was heard for two hours. We were able to ascertain later that a Russian ammunition

train in the station had been blown up. The blowing up had probably been carried out by one person who, shortly afterwards, was picked up by an airplane. Several German soldiers on the outskirts of the town, armed only with rifles, had observed that half an hour after the first explosion a small plane had landed in a meadow about 2 km. from the western edge of the town, and immediately afterwards took flight. Its descent went unnoticed because the general attention would have been attracted by the explosion and dominated the noise of the propeller by the continuous detonations. We agree in recognizing in this action a proof of cold blood.

6. Russia

Struggles in the Koselisk area.

Spiritual orientation of the population.

When we stayed in Suchinitschi the mass of the Division was still about 8 km. away from that locality. That is why we stayed there for two days. In the evening of October 8 I received by radio from the commander of the XIII Army Corps, to whom I reported, the following order (not verbatim): "Strong enemy column with many horsemen is on October 8 advancing from the east on Lichvin; head of the column in the afternoon 25 km. east of that locality. The XIII Corps advances with the southern column through Kaluga on Serpuchow. The 52nd Division will reach Koselisk and prevent enemy action against the communications and the army's rear.

This was a task of enviable independence, such as very rarely arises in war. In the north the supporting forces were about 70 km away from us and could not support or otherwise exert an influence on future developments in the Division, as the XIII Corps consisted exclusively of foot units. For the rest, it was engaged in the fight for the passages over the Ugra in the Kaluga area. To the southwest the troops themselves were at an even greater distance engaged in difficult forest battles. And in the south there was not a single soldier of ours. There was no further information about the enemy coming from the east, who had been located by aerial reconnaissance. Its head could be found on the evening of October 8 about 50 to 60 km. away from Koselisk. In this completely isolated situation, in which I could only count on my own forces, I was especially sorry that the Division was weakened by a third of its infantry and a quarter of its artillery.

The small town of Koselisk is located 50 km. east of Suchinitschi, on the Shisdra. This watercourse, 40 to 50 meters wide, was fordable in many parts. From Suchinitschi to Koselisk led a dirt road through a wide gully in which several villages were located. The land between the two localities was uncultivated and was cut, in places, by deep ravines. East of Koselisk, on the bank of the other side of the Shisdra, on the extension of the road, there was a belt of crops several kilometers wide which on the north and south was enclosed by forests that reached down to the river.

When in July we had to turn from the north over Rogatshev, the situation seemed to me to be very unclear. An analogous impression, only even more intense, I had when we followed behind the enemy who had fallen back behind the Dnieper. The same thing happened in the fights in the forests. On the evening of that October 8 the uncertainty about the situation reached a special degree. The only thing that was clear was that we had to reach Koselisk as soon as possible. Until October 9 this was only possible with the most mobile scouting detachment, which was also reinforced by three companies of cyclists and which seized the locality after dislodging enemy patrols. On the morning of the 10th the enemy had established himself on the eastern bank and kept up a lively fire. An attack was to be counted on at all times. There were no elements of judgment about the effectiveness of the adversary.

In the race to have the largest possible forces in the Koselisk area before the enemy, the units again made extraordinary efforts. The leading regiment which had left at 03:00 on October 9, already on the morning of the 10th took over, with one part, the defense of the locality and occupied, with the other, the gently descending slopes on both sides of it. The mass of artillery had arrived simultaneously and was ready for the defense.

34. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

at noon. The scouting detachment was withdrawn to be sent to take the bridge over the Shisdra at Peremysche, 20 km. to the north. A motorized patrol was to scout in the Shisdra valley to the south, but ran into an enemy security fraction about 60 km. away and was left there. The Division Command was billeted in the small village of Filajevo west of Koselisk.

About noon on October 10 the enemy attacked Koselisk after a short burst of fire. He broke into the locality in two parts; but was quickly dislodged. In our possession remained a number of prisoners, among them some officers. The picture of the enemy now became clear. We had in front of us the 13th Cavalry Division, of whose four regiments, two were to seize Koselisk at once in order to facilitate the passage of the river projected in full force. This passage was to be made after the arrival of one to two regiments of riflemen who were still expected the same afternoon. The cavalry division was then to advance through Suchi-nitschi against the communications of the German forces advancing on Kaluga.

In the afternoon of October 10 the other regiment of the 52nd Division also arrived. Effective defense required covering a fairly large area by our forces, weak in relation to those of the enemy. It was nevertheless unavoidable to retain a strong reserve. A particularly difficult case presented itself here; that of determining the ratio of troops between the forces committed for the imminent combat and the reserves. The doctrine states very well that the reserves must be greater the less clear the situation is. On the other hand, the forces committed should not be reduced beyond a certain measure if the whole is not to be illusory.

The scouting detachment had not been able to gain the bridge of Peremysche, because this locality had been occupied shortly before its arrival, by the Russians. It prevented however the projected advance of the enemy towards the south on Koselisk managing to eliminate 7 tanks. It was also verified that the enemy grouping to the east of the Shisdra had a battalion of tanks and a battalion of motorized shooters, which were directed to Peremysche to take possession of the bridge.

The units felt the numerical superiority of the enemy and worked feverishly in their positions. I felt the superior mobility of the Russian cavalry division very uncomfortably. Although the task of my Division arose almost necessarily from the situation, it was clear that troops on foot are not well suited for an operational mission that requires covering a large area. My task would have to be extraordinarily difficult if my Russian opponent tried to hold on to me with the riflemen of his Division, while with his cavalry Division he tried to pass the river well to the south and from there tried to accomplish his task on the backs of our forces. As the cavalry division had four regiments of the gun and tanks at its disposal, it would have been too weak to achieve a result there that would have been in any way decisive; but it could have caused a good deal of damage and much perplexity. The direction in which it had been pawned by the Russian high command was, at any rate, very good. It was not known whether the Russians did not have larger mobile forces at their disposal or whether, because of the situation in which they found themselves, they wanted to avoid the difficult problems of leadership which a larger-scale action would necessarily cause. I suspect the former.

I was struck by the analogy of the situation then with that of Rogatshev, where the Russians also launched an isolated counteroffensive with forces which, although superior to ours, were completely inadequate to their real task.

The Russian commander resolved for the least talented solution of his mission, a solution which was the most dangerous for me but, from the German point of view, the most favorable for the situation of the whole: he attacked on the morning of October 11 the Division with the mass of the cavalry Division and with a regiment of riflemen, while a cavalry regiment passed on horseback.

the Shisdra further south, making a wide encircling movement. The armored grouping at Peremysche remained surprisingly inactive. The fight for Koselisk remained indecisive for a long time. At every opportunity our units, notwithstanding the wide front they occupied, managed to dislodge the enemy who managed to break through. At about 08:00 the enemy managed to occupy the positions north of the locality, dislodging a part of the infantry established on the blades of the terrain and pushing them to the west.

The reserve of the division was in the hollows behind the left wing, i.e. in a very favorable position in view

of this development of the situation. Only one battalion was located southwest of Koselisk. I expressly forbade an intervention of the reserves on my own initiative, which I had to count on, given the tactical instruction of their commander, and I also called in two companies of cyclists who were in reserve in Peremysche. They were able to reach the fighting area by 0900. Somewhat later the enemy also made a large breakthrough to the south of the town.

The front could no longer be maintained without support. I did not yet consider the situation sufficiently ripe for a counterattack, which would not occur until the enemy had overrun the positions and reached free ground, so I refused all requests to use the reserves. This long wait was a great strain on the nerves of the units. I also had to exert a great deal of control over myself to withhold the order for the counterattack for such a long time. At 0830 the enemy resumed the attack to the north of the locality; the concentrated fire of all the batteries always managed to stop it again. At that time also came the news that so far the attacks of the mounted regiment against the islands of resistance formed by sapper units at dominant points in the depth of the southern flank had failed.

Shortly before 09:00, the enemy to the south of the locality also began to gain ground. At 09:00 I gave the order to counterattack. Shortly afterwards I learned that the two companies of cyclists had just arrived at that time. The surprise shock of the reserves took the adversary on the flank; the concentrated artillery fire always preceded the infantry. The cooperation of both arms could not have been more perfect on an exercise field. By 10:00 the enemy's entire attack front had been overwhelmed. The Russians had consumed all their reserves in the combat, which lasted several hours. Some of their squadrons were reduced to only 9 men. The beaten enemy retreated to their positions on the eastern bank of the river. The mounted regiment also disappeared. More than 300 enemy dead were left on the battlefield.

When I came down from the observatory over the Philajevo camp, my excellent and well-trying staff officer, Major Worgitzky came to meet me with the latest parts. We shook hands silently for a long time. I had the feeling that with that handshake we were drawing a final line to the critical and difficult hours.

A combat drive like that of Koselisk, on the German side, was only possible with well-trained units, capable of mastering the impressions of the fight, and with very good commanders. The war-preparatory training which we developed for almost a year in France, notwithstanding the high degree of training already possessed by the units, together with the warlike qualities of the soldiers from Hesse and Wesfalia, of which the mass of the Division was composed, produced the most valuable fruits. And although in my numerous and varied subsequent assignments I came to command a third of the units of the German army, I did not find any commanders or units that surpassed those of the 52nd Division.

All experience shows that the losses of well-instructed units are almost always much less than those of poorly instructed units led by inadequately trained commanders and sub-chiefs. That is why a State is guilty of the gravest injustice to its people if it does not proceed to impart in a timely manner the most complete instruction for the fulfillment of its tasks to the men who might at some time be called upon to fight. for the country and if it does not take measures to have well-prepared chiefs for the leadership of units in war. The argument of not wanting war and of rejecting the thought of waging war cannot be accepted. Here it is a question of whether the responsible persons and organs of a state can safely have the guarantee of never being forced even into a purely defensive war or of being able to keep away in any way from a war. This applies also and above all to small countries which, to a much lesser extent, have the possibility of influencing in their favor the circumstances by which they might be drawn into a war. The omissions of a State, within the framework of the military instruction of the people, are always paid for with a greater tribute of blood; but never with the blood of the persons or responsible organs of governments and congresses, but always with the blood of that mass of the people who take no part in State resolutions.

The military training of the people should be considered from this point of view and not only from that of the conduct of the war. The financial sacrifices required for training, which are undoubtedly not small, should always be judged also in their relation to the maintenance of the vitality which the people have hitherto enjoyed. Such thoughts occurred to me several times during the war, but especially again when comparing the small

36. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

casualties of our forces with the particularly high losses of the Russians in the fighting at Koselisk. This was not the experience of an isolated episode but one gathered during the whole war, as I could see before and after. If the 52nd Division had not been so excellently instructed in the fights it had had to fight until then it would probably have lost all its fighting power.

On October 11 for the rest of the day it was completely quiet. The prisoners provided numerous details about the organization of the cavalry with which the 52nd Division had to contend here for the first and last time. During the winter battle I once heard mention of a Russian cavalry corps which, on our backs, attacked the small town of Juchnow defended by the baggage and supply columns of my Division. It was repulsed with heavy casualties and disappeared forever. The Russians had only a small number of cavalry groupings at their disposal and, at least in Central Russia, these hardly intervened. Another piece of news we received from the prisoners stated that numerous large groupings were being organized in the area east of Moscow, but that they were far from being ready.

The rest we enjoyed for a few days gave me the opportunity to talk with some of the local inhabitants. The day before I had been struck by the good looks of a man of tall stature and quite old. He wore a long grayish-white beard and looked like a typical Tolstoy figure. His father had been the administrator of a duke's estate; he himself had attended a school of agronomy and had worked under his father in the administration, with the prospect of ever occupying his position, until the revolution changed the situation. What he could least forgive the communists was the expropriation and division of the large estates as well as the eviction and partly also the death of the previous owners. The reproach that followed was that they had forbidden the practices of religion. He was of the opinion that this prohibition was absolutely superfluous and harmful, since the Russian religion demanded from men obedience towards the state and based this demand on divine laws. It is also a great comfort and support for all in case of sorrows and sickness. The lack of this spiritual help is keenly felt by the older people, and not by the youth under 30 years of age, because they had never heard anything about religion; but not a few young people often showed a great spiritual restlessness, which they could not make disappear due to the lack of religion.

He recognized that youth were learning much more than in earlier times, but he believed that their souls atrophied. He remembered that in his youth he wept at the poetry of Puschkin and Lermontov. With today's youth this was absolutely out of the question. He could not understand, he said, "the feeling of the poet." When I asked him his opinion of the Kolkhoz organization, the former manager of a large rural estate reappeared. He considered it adequate insofar as it induced the peasants to work; he also acknowledged that the Kolkhoz yield was higher than that of the previous large estates, adding that this was completely natural, since they worked with machines. I also asked him about the purpose of the installation of loudspeakers and the modest speaker's stand in the main square, which I had previously seen in numerous other localities as well. He replied that news of interest to the inhabitants, especially to the youth, was broadcast almost daily, since there were no newspapers. Lectures were also frequently broadcast, which the whole town had to attend. The topics of the latest lectures were about the situation of workers in the United States and England, the programs of industrial production in the Soviet Union, the duties of Soviet citizens and similar questions. Rarely did speakers come from a city. The last one to arrive spoke about the five-year plan, continually stressing the need for everyone to perform better and better in their work. For the rest, he was of the opinion that the people were happy, for he lacked the possibility of comparison for discontent to arise. For him the only element of comparison was the life in the great estates of the previous period. Of the Western world he had not even an approximate idea.

I also found the individual conversation with young people of both sexes between 15 and 18 years of age, who are very numerous here, very interesting. No one knew anything about Christ. Some recalled having heard that name from their parents. About the priests, some of them had heard at school that they had been instruments of the bourgeoisie which in the past exploited the people and that, for the benefit of the people, the churches had been closed and the priests expelled. For all the greatest man was Stalin, although this was

admitted only hesitantly, and the most powerful country was Russia. A special fanaticism was shown in this respect by some young people. This attitude and idiosyncrasy of the youth, which I found analogous in the youth of all regions of Russia, made a deep impression on me and aroused many thoughts.

The Soviet government succeeded in winning over to itself all the men who had known practically no other regime and to enthuse many of them. These were in 1941, as a rule, those 30 years of age and younger. In the rural population, a marked critical disposition was not infrequently shown among people of a certain age, even though among them, too, there were numerous supporters, even fanatics of the regime. The greatest number of enthusiasts, even among the elderly, was to be found among industrial workers, as I soon found out. During my stay of more than two years in Russia, I gained the impression that at the beginning of the war a large part, perhaps the majority of the Russian people, were unconditional supporters of the Soviet State.

The Russian state achieved this goal by education and skillful propaganda, by the elimination of all opposing forces, by intervention in literature and the press, and by keeping the people hermetically isolated from the rest of the world. The latter was of special importance because of the low standard of living. The precarious living conditions of the people, without comparison with other peoples, and given that everyone knew the past by the account of those older than them, were, in practice, the only source of discontent. Other issues, such as religion, took a back seat.

When in January 1945 I took over the command in chief of the battle for East Prussia, I was able to see the influence that the German standard of living had on the Russian soldiers fighting in the battle for East Prussia.

in that region and to which I will return later. In the meantime, there are already many millions of Russians who, after having worked or been prisoners in Germany or having been there in the war or as occupation troops, have returned to Russia. And they have seen much, if not always the best. This will create some difficulties for the regime, but they can be overcome, given the spiritual orientation of people of that age.

7. Russia

In the mud period. 70 km from Moscow!

War of position in November. The landscape of Gogol.

In the first days of October I was informed of the statement made at a press conference by the Reich Press Chief over the radio that the Russians had been beaten and that the war in the East was practically over. We were very unpleasantly and annoyingly impressed by this opinion absolutely contrary to the facts and said to ourselves that the Supreme Command must be in an unfortunate error, unless in issuing this statement it was seeking a special purpose, which, of course, we did not know. From immediate and direct experience we knew that the Russians, although they had suffered enormous losses, had not been beaten and that, apart from the battles in the pockets, they had always managed to avoid the final decision. Our fights in Rogatschev, in the Desna and finally in Koselisk, were small examples of this, but they also served to characterize the situation as a whole.

By the morning of October 12 the Russians had disappeared. Nearby scouting found the region free of enemy. Also the armored grouping at Peremysche had retreated eastward. In the north, the own troops, after breaking the enemy resistance on the Ugra, had recently entered Kaluga. I received orders to start the Division on 13 October for Kaluga. The city was about 70 km away. We marched through Peremysche directly north on dirt roads only, and on the last stretch of this route we reached the Suchinitschi-Kaluga road, the floor of which was somewhat firm. The nature of the road was gradually beginning to assume a decisive importance, for the autumn rainy season had slowly begun and the autumn mud period was imminent.

In the last few days short showers had fallen, which greatly reduced traffic on the roads. After five days of extremely arduous marching for personnel, livestock and engines, the Division reached the area between Kaluga and 20 km east of the city. The full intensity of the mud period then began. Rain fell frequently for days on end. The mud on the roads was up to one's knees; in the hollows with soft soil one sank into it to a depth of half a meter. Traffic with motor vehicles had become impossible. Only very heavy tractors could move, even without a load attached, albeit with maximum use of the engine and considerable fuel consumption. Regional light horse-drawn vehicles could only travel a short distance with a reduced load. For bad stretches of road, it was necessary to take timely measures to reinforce the draft of the vehicles and to change the exhausted livestock. For movements, the units could only resort to these light peasant vehicles used in the region.

The regular army vehicles that were still in the units' equipment were immobilized. The regional light horse-drawn wagons that supplied the units stationed in the localities had to find their way through the stubble and could only be loaded with a maximum of 100 to 150 kilograms. A track used once in such circumstances could no longer be used by another vehicle, as it became too deep.

These were the conditions that the autumn mud period brought for traffic. They continued until the arrival of ice which in Central Russia can be counted on in the second half of November. Thus should be interpreted the paradox that we in Russia really longed for the arrival of the ice period. A second period of mud appears in the spring at the end of the

winter cold. It usually lasts a few weeks longer and makes the roads even muddier.

In the time of the tsars, Kaluga was a governorate capital. It is situated on the left bank of the Oka, which is a 150-meter wide river. The view of the city from the south is very impressive, because essentially from there the abnormally large number of churches appears. Some of them are imposing constructions of great architectural beauty. In one of them the Russian Government had authorized the celebration of the divine service; but the priests had to pay for it a high tax, whose amount was gathered by means of donations of the believers. The other churches were closed and showed signs of demolition. Although there was practically no religious life in

Russia, it could not be said that it was totally impeded, as I was able to prove on other occasions.

Representative buildings are clustered around the main square and the market of the former capital of the government, all of which still date back to the time of the tsars. The extensive urban area also has many streets with multi-storey masonry buildings. Naturally, there were also many alleys with buildings of little appearance, and the suburbs consisted almost exclusively of wooden houses and huts. To one or another of these dwellings, which I saw carefully, Dostoyevsky could have taken before his eyes, when describing the staircase and the room of the moneylender murdered by Raskolnikov.

The shortage of rooms was also very great in the cities of Russia. Nowhere could I see any signs that work was being done on the construction of buildings. Only in Ljudinovo did I see a group of newly completed multi-story houses of reinforced concrete, intended for offices and living quarters for the personnel of the paper industry that was being set up there. In Kaluga the inhabitants lived closely packed together. I looked at some of the houses closely and everywhere I saw cleanliness and order. In one room there were five very narrow iron beds at equal distance from each other; they were of a uniform type, which we often find in the localities. In that room lived five people who were otherwise unrelated to each other; among them was a woman. As space, each had his bed and one of the intervals to the next bed; his clothes and belongings were kept under the bed. The former three-room dwelling was occupied by 17 people, who had a kitchen at their disposal in which there were still two more beds.

We took lodging in the party house, which seemed to be the only large building erected after the IGM. The house was well furnished, but no luxuries were provided. One sofa and the corresponding armchairs were upholstered with artificial leather, which must have come as a surprise in the country of leather.

Shortly after the Division arrived in the Kaluga area I received a mission which, by the way, was the one I had least expected. At a distance of about 90 km northeast of Kaluga the Protva, coming from the north, flows into the Oka. The forces of the 2nd Army had reached the Protva and because of the mud period had passed there to rest. Only in the area of the mouth of the river there were no troops. That area was now to be reached as soon as possible by the Division. With its right end resting on the Oka, it was to constitute there the right wing of the 2nd Army. On the other side of the Oka there were no own or enemy forces.

At that time, a march of the Division with its normal organization, that is, with its motorized vehicles and heavy animal-drawn vehicles, was ruled out. In order to carry out such a march, organic measures were required; they were immediately adopted. In a few days, all the baggage was organized with regional light vehicles and numerous supplies that would not be needed immediately were deposited in guarded assembly places. The heavy artillery group remained at Kaluga as did two pieces and two ammunition carts from each light battery. The pieces and ammunition carriages which were normally drawn by six horses were now to be used eight or ten; the remaining horses were to be used as reserves. Also the more than 1,000 trucks of the Division were left at Kaluga. Everything that was left behind there was to be brought forward when the ice season came. My command was reduced to the most indispensable collaborators and also had no motorized vehicles but only saddle horses and a small baggage of light wagons.

In any case, the attempt to make the march had to be made and I was hopeful that it would be carried out. The Division was most probably the only one on the eastern front which in the mud period had to make a long march.

I had two great worries: the first was the dangerous weakness in artillery and the other the subsequent supply. This supply based at Kaluga, 80 km. away, was to be ruled out without motorized vehicles if the railroad from Kaluga to Tula could not be released back into service, at least for a good distance. After a few days it was possible to resume traffic up to about 40 km east of Kaluga, where the track crosses the Oka.

The march began on October 22. A fine rain fell throughout the day. The infantry sought its way along the divisional edges of fields on both sides of the road. The vehicles were almost always axle deep in the mud; little could be seen of the paddles of the low horses. The sticky soil of the fields and the deep mud tore off the half-

40. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

boots of pedestrians and the shoes of horses. So my horse, already on the second day, had no shoes at all, which was not important because of the soft soil. The region alternated between agricultural fields and forests. The ride in the forest was the worst. Our baggage was not enough for the four days of walking. Nor were there any accommodations prepared. On the first day of the march we arrived late in the evening at the planned location and were accommodated in a school. One room was made into a bed with grass; on top of it were placed the saddle blankets, whose strong horse odor was sure to keep the bedbugs away; to cover ourselves we used the wet capes. The dampness, which was very much felt with the prevailing cold, was reduced by the warmth of the good Russian stoves. As the supplies in the saddle bags had only been calculated for the first day, the next day there was only tea and potatoes. On one occasion an old ram was found.

The next day continued under the same conditions. The rain abated, but this resulted in the mud on the roads becoming thicker and stickier after a few hours, thus placing an even greater obstacle to the movement. It is not possible to relate what the personnel and livestock have yielded in these marches.

Until then we had had no contact with the enemy. At noon on the third day, October 24, the vanguard collided with the enemy at the small Tarussa River, which was then carrying a lot of water and which flows into the Oka near the locality of the same name. A few hours passed until the leading regiment, supported by some batteries, managed to dislodge the enemy and occupy the locality as well as the northern bank, which constituted a strong position in the terrain. The success of the day corresponded in great part to the valor of two officers and their soldiers. The commander of an artillery group, the then Major Gosewisch, galloped forward in infantry fire with two pieces to the locality and successively beat off with direct fire the Russian footholds organized in the masonry houses. A sapper lieutenant, whose name I unfortunately no longer remember, prevented by his daring intervention the prepared blowing up of the bridge at the exit of the locality.

Tarussa was a picturesque locality with numerous small wooden chalet-type buildings. Moscow theater artists used to spend the summer here.

An enemy battery on the east bank of the Oka kept the town under fire until nightfall. We spent the night in a small village west of Tarussa. In the vicinity was a church, where divine services were regularly held. The pastor could not be found on that occasion.

We had reached somewhat higher ground, with good drainage by numerous small watercourses, so that the mud period was felt considerably less here. The weather also changed and we had beautiful days, the sun showing itself again after a long absence. The march went much more smoothly and we were to reach, barring some unforeseeable obstacle, the Protva, our objective, on October 25 with the first units. A good protection of the right flank was provided by the Oka, which here was already about 200 meters wide. On our left were our troops with whom we had not yet established liaison. In consideration of the proximity of the enemy, the Division continued the march on the 25th in two columns.

The right column collided with the enemy at Volkowskoje, a large village west of the Protva, and repulsed him on the other side of this river; but it was unable to gain the bank because of the coming of darkness. Everywhere else the units reached the sectors of the river assigned to them. The next morning the enemy made a surprise attack on Volkowskoje with two regiments of sharpshooters and drove the regiment out of that town. But the latter was soon again firmly in the hand of its energetic commander, who in a very short time led it to counterattack from the west, unexpectedly for the adversary, occupying the locality and pushing the enemy against the river. Only after a few days it was possible to conquer the entire margin on this side of the river.

The counterattack on Volkowskoje is a beautiful example of how an excellent unit with war experience, which in all grades is conducted with cold blood and courage, recovers from a setback suffered and then, with increased energy, goes into action. Such a unit, in all situations, will perform at its best and will never fail. At the same time, it will suffer much less losses than a unit with less training and poorly conducted.

We organized the defense in the Protva. The area is about 70 km. southwest of Moscow. On clear nights we could see the anti-aircraft fire that was to protect the capital against night attacks. The weak part of our position was its right flank. It was protected only by the Oka, which was undoubtedly a powerful obstacle as long as it did not freeze. The forces did not suffice for the occupation of the river to an adequate extent. It was guarded

only by a widely scattered squadron. The other bank of the Oka was enemy ground. The Division Command was billeted in the small and poor village Pekanskaja. Days after our arrival at Protva, we received the surprising but welcome order to settle there for the winter.

The situation on the Protva soon calmed down and positional warfare developed here in its familiar forms. About 20 km. on the other side of the river is the town of Serpuchow, where large artillery workshops are installed and were still in operation. From there a single-track railroad crossed the Oka to the southeast with a daily traffic of several trains. It passed about 20 km. from our right wing. The thought arose spontaneously to interrupt this railroad traffic.

One evening at dusk, a destroyer patrol of sappers passed across the Oka at a carefully chosen point, concealed the float in the dense marginal undergrowth and by compass, headed for the railroad. In the morning she reached its vicinity and remained hidden during the day. At dusk the blasting was carried out. The difficult part was the return at night, since it was necessary to find the transfer point through the forest and undergrowth. In the spirit of foresight, floats were kept ready at various points on the northern bank; fire protection was also set up with machine guns and grenade launchers. It was always a mystery to me how the patrol found its float again and the next morning returned safely without assistance.

Aerial photography showed a large crater produced by the blast on the embankment and the destroyed rails. A train was stopped a short distance from the blast site, and when the train stopped, the train was in the middle of the explosion.

The Russian army was able to be stopped in time. I was able to make the observation here, confirmed repeatedly in the aftermath, that the Russians were masters at quickly repairing destroyed railroads and bridges. Thirty-six hours after the blasting we were able to observe the usual traffic on the railway line. The action of the sappers loses nothing in daring even if due to circumstances independent of them it does not achieve a result worthy of mention.

Only old women and numerous children were left in our village. We were able to observe again how extraordinarily modest these people were. A couple of carved wooden plates, a wooden spoon, a small pot, a bark made from a hollowed out tree trunk for making bread dough and an axe constituted the main household utensils. The circumstances of war also greatly simplified the life of people accustomed to greater demands. In the same way also the soldier had for his meals and drinks as well as for the kitchen itself only his kettle, plate, cutlery and jug, which serve a universal purpose.

The rain had stopped at the beginning of November, but it was still cold, and the damp air made itself felt intensely. Once again the good Russian stoves showed their full usefulness; they occupy one-sixth, sometimes even one-fifth of the room, which is almost always both living room and kitchen. The Russians literally let themselves be "roasted" on the stove benches, heated by the stove, while our soldiers could hardly stand it for an hour. Shortly thereafter there were heavy frosts and we were able to bring in the parts, vehicles and supplies we had left behind in Kaluga. In mid-November the first snow fell. The baggage vehicles were exchanged for light sledges and the trucks were sent back to Kaluga. Only a few columns were at the service of the supply from the final railroad station by the only road that by all means we kept open.

At that time, the first reports of cases of exanthematous fever arrived from the rear districts. Vaccinations against this dangerous disease were carried out; at that time it was applied only to persons over 50 years of age, to commandos and sanitary personnel, since limited quantities of vaccine were available. The carrier of this disease is the louse. It was not possible, in practice, to protect against this parasite during the cold season, as all Russian houses were heavily infested with lice and they were indispensable for lodging.

I soon became acquainted with the 16-kilometer-long position in all its details. Work was going on continuously on its completion and preparations for the winter. Thanks to the river that ran between us and the Russians, the positional warfare went on very quietly, so that left us plenty of free time.

At the onset of frost the infantry regiment with the artillery group which shortly after the Desna pass we had had to surrender to the 2nd Army, started the march to rejoin the Division; but it had to be left about 50 km. to the west, at Aleksin, on the Oka, in the wing of the 2nd Armored Army.

42. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

Shortly after setting foot on Russian soil I experienced the very difficult to explain effect that this country produces. With much effort I gradually succeeded in understanding some aspects of its present life. Soon I felt the need to read here again the old Russian writers, in the country itself; they knew how to describe so masterfully the social life of their time, the soul of men in its aspects independent of all epochs as well as the Russian landscape, that they had already before brought all this up before my spirit. I promised myself to collect many elements of judgment from a new reading. It was a very happy coincidence that precisely in that quiet period some books by Dostoiowski, Tschechow and Gogol arrived. How many people I had hitherto encountered here could be taken from those books! Their thinking had undoubtedly been modified, other concepts had been instilled in them, and another was the way of life; but their soul was, in its foundations, the same as before.

It is characteristic of the countless characters in these novels that the powerful influence of the Russian landscape is felt, whether they live in a dirty alley, in the palace of a rural landowner or in a peasant's hut, whether they struggle to live even in the most precarious conditions, whether they take part in lavish parties, perform hard rural labor as serfs or sit in a tavern drinking vodka, whether they take part in lavish feasts, whether they perform hard rural labor as servants or whether they are sitting in the tavern, indulging in vodka, whether they love passionately, hate faintly or are praying before a miraculous icon. In the souls of these men is reflected the infinite breadth of the landscape in which they have grown up, with its mysteries and its harshness. And that landscape largely exerts the preponderant influence on them when these men become rebellious, resigned or compassionate.

Having traveled more than a thousand and a half kilometers in Russia in intimate contact with nature, I was deeply impressed by the words that Gogol found for the Russian country in his "Dead Souls" 130 years ago:

"From far away a song is heard. The tips of pine trees disappear in the fog. Crows far away, somewhere, like flies, and an infinite horizon. Russia, oh Russia! I gaze at you from my distant flowery paradise. Everything in you is poor, abandoned, miserable, rude and inhospitable. In you no magnificent marvel of nature will unite with the still more superb creations of art to gladden and enchant the eye. In vain do you look for cities with superb palaces of innumerable windows towering on steep summits; or those ivy-covered mansions in which, amid the roar of thick waterfalls and sprinkled by the eternal dust of these, grow beautiful trees; one need not turn one's face to behold blocks of rock piled to a dizzying height; no glittering, endless mountain range, rising in the diaphanous silver sky, gleams in the distance and is seen through a row of dark arches in which vines, ivy and countless brambles are intertwined.

In you everything is flat, flat, sad; your humble villages appear as barely visible spots on your infinite plain. There is nothing to enrapture the eye and enchant the heart ...

But what mysterious, secret, inexplicable force draws us to you? Why does the plaintive song that vibrates from sea to sea everywhere over the vast plain constantly resound in my ears? What is the meaning of that call that sobs and steals our souls? What notes are those that insinuate themselves like an aching caress to my heart and haunt it continually?

Russia, what do you want from me? What incomprehensible ties keep us bound to each other?"

8. Russia

The winter battle begins. Step by step retreat to Detschino.

Night attack on Bolscheno.

After the arrival of ice the forces located to the north in the Moscow region had resumed the fight for this city without reaching their objective. With the same purpose the 2nd Armored Army was directed from the Orel area for Tula. Tula was about 80 km. south of our right flank. We had a special interest in the operations of this army, because from them we promised ourselves an effective protection of the southern flank. But this army overran Tula with only parts of its forces and later had to be pushed back to the west. When it became evident that nothing was to be expected on that side and that the flank remained unprotected, winter had progressed and a fairly high layer of snow covered the frozen ground to a good depth.

The increasing cold increased the concern about the fate of the right flank. In early December the Oka on cold nights was already forming a thin layer of ice, which by then was broken up in the course of the day. With trepidation we looked forward to the time when this great river would be so frozen that it could bear heavy loads. The carrying capacity of the ice was examined daily and we observed that the Russians did the same. An enemy attack across the Oka would place the Division in a difficult situation and, depending on the cash employed, the Army as well. This was well known to the higher command. But neither the higher command nor the Division had the forces to organize the defense along the Oka. The Division, of course, had done all it could; but alone it might be somewhat insufficient.

An elimination or at least a significant decrease of the danger to the flank would only be possible if the right wing of the army was bent backwards, seeking at the same time the support of the 2nd Armored Army in Aleksin on the Oka. This would have led the units of several Divisions into unprepared terrain, in the time of the big cold, with snow and frozen ground. If that consideration was the cause for standing still in the face of an imminently threatening danger, then I had to tell myself, later on, that a different resolution would most probably have been taken if the Higher Command already at that time had had at its disposal the experiences that were gathered in the Winter Battle.

By December 10 the temperature dropped to almost -30°. Heavy snow soon fell. On December 16 the enemy launched the expected attack. For the Division that day was the beginning of the Winter Battle. The attack was initiated by two Russian Divisions, whose clash could only be delayed for a short time by our weak forces on the Oka. The Russians soon reached almost behind the center of the Division, even though their movement was greatly hampered by high snow. The situation seemed hopeless, notwithstanding the possibility of such a development had been taken into account. The most important thing was that the artillery horses were billeted a short distance from the pieces. Radio communication with the regiment on the right and in the center had been interrupted as their battle stations had been stormed by the Russians. For that reason the orders for them were transmitted through the regiment on the left and this was done by officer patrols, of an effective 30 men. These patrols made their way in some parts through the Russians, who held their own.

completely passive in spite of the favorable and unique situation achieved. The prisoners taken in the following days clarified this extraordinary fact by declaring that the Russians were counting on a strong German counterattack. This is a new example of the schematic mentality of the Russian leadership.

It was possible to withdraw the right wing and the center of the Division in complete order to the zones which it was planned to occupy; it was also possible to bring out all the artillery. Only a small amount of heavy infantry guns of the front line had to be left behind, as far as the horses could not be advanced. The realization of the withdrawal in the given situation was a true feat of the units, which gave an exemplary proof of their

44. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

discipline and cold blood as well as of their technical ability.

New snowfalls just that December 16 raised the snow cover to a height of 75 centimeters. Movement off the open shoveled road, or tamped down by pedestrians and livestock, was very difficult and became worse and worse as even more snow fell. We remained only one day in the new position and fell back to the wooded area west of Pekanskaja because of the Russian enveloping movements that began again.

The rejection of frontal attacks would not have been difficult, especially since the high snow was a formidable obstacle for the attacker. But the flank was still open and the overflowing movements of the enemy did not meet with any resistance there. In this way and for a relatively long time we were continually driven out of our positions, only by the enemy's marches. Because of the enemy's pressure our retreat could not be made in the direction of our previous path of advance, that is, not in a westerly direction but in a somewhat northwesterly direction, although every effort was made to fall back as perpendicularly as possible to the original front in order to close the clearing with the neighbor on the right as soon as possible.

Already at the beginning of the Winter Battle, the enormous disadvantage of the fact that no replacement personnel had yet arrived at the front was evident. The combat strength had been reduced to such an extent that it was not possible to think of assigning to a unit the mission to be carried out normally by it, not even approximately. This fact and the great extent of the front which had been assigned to the Division and also to all the other groupings, made it impossible to cover the fronts sufficiently and to keep reserves worth mentioning ready. Thus it came about in some parts, here and there, to front filtrations without fighting of enemy groups of different strength, which not infrequently produced a result analogous to that of the large overflowing groupings on the wing. Also the limits between the Divisions and Army Corps were almost always only weakly covered points, because the groupings had to strive, before anything else, to maintain at least the internal cohesion.

Because of the heavy snow, attacks against the flanks of the infiltrating enemy, which in normal conditions would not have been difficult tactically, were usually not possible. At the same time, the cold was getting colder and colder. While the Russians were well equipped against the cold, with warm clothing, felt shoes, heavy capes, fur caps and gloves, our troops had the same clothing with which they had started the war in the summer. As, of course, there were no prepared positions with shelters anywhere, the troops had to spend the days and nights in the open with their absolutely inadequate clothing; the frozen ground did not allow digging even the most modest cover. It was not until the second half of February 1942 that the Division received small supplies of winter clothing, so that at least one piece of warm clothing could be issued to each man. It is not possible to relate the sufferings and deprivations of the units during the Winter Battle. It is not surprising that the number of frostbitten legs, arms, face and ears was frighteningly high and that casualties. The losses of the Division due to the influence of the cold were several times higher than those caused by the fighting.

In other respects, too, we were not equipped against the bitter cold. Lubricants for vehicles and tanks could not withstand the low temperatures and froze to stone hardness. The lubricant for weapons also froze. Thus, for example, machine guns that were not firing could not be used unless they were kept warm, which was almost impossible during marches and in positions that were not to be uncovered. Fortunately we found a resource in the form of oil which was found in limited quantities in the population and which did not freeze and kept the guns in serviceable condition unless they were used very intensively. However, after a certain time, it attacked the metal.

For this absolute lack of forecasts for the Russian winter the Chief of Staff of the Army and the General Headquarters are responsible. Some clarification may be found in the diary of the then Chief of Staff, Colonel General Halder, presented at Nuremberg, in which he says in an entry of July 1941 that his initial prediction that the war would be over in a few months' time seems to be more and more correct. This gross misjudgment could have been rectified by any campaign commander at the front. But even if one had counted on a termination of the war against Russia in the autumn, one must have known that even then one would have had to leave forces

with a strength of many hundreds of thousands of men in that country, who would also have had to spend the winter there.

It was later claimed that winter clothing was ready, but that because of the catastrophic difficulties of transport for supplies created by the winter cold, there was only a choice between winter clothing or ammunition and fuel, and that in this situation clothing had to take second place. This statement does not stand up to analysis, since winter supplies must have been at the front long before the beginning of the winter season, as was also the case in the winter of 1942. On the other hand, when in the early spring of 1942 we received the first winter garments in small quantities, we did not receive any of them as prepared army material, but all of them came from private donations.

In the wooded area west of Pekanskaja, where the Division had withdrawn, there were few small villages. The units built temporary snow covers for groups. Behind this "front", large campfires were constantly burning, where the men warmed themselves in groups. The temperature sometimes dropped to -35°. One day we had -46°. On that day, fortunately, there was almost no wind, so the cold was not felt so much. We seldom stayed in one position for more than a day and then retreated several miles. It would not have been possible to do much more walking either.

Still during the course of the Winter Battle the question which had given rise to lively discussions in the Supreme Command became known in a small circle. It was whether the army should yield step by step to the Russian pressure or whether, on the contrary, it should retreat from 200 to 300 km. at once, in order to close the gaps between the armies and within the armies themselves.

Already the very short marches in the high snow imposed extraordinary efforts on the cattle, which in spite of the intense cold could never be housed in stables, so that they succumbed in great numbers, especially the artillery. In a period of three weeks, this casualty reached in my Division almost a group of artillery, that is to say, a quarter of the arm. In the heavy infantry weapons the picture was similar. Only in the baggages, with their small horses, very long-suffering, the situation was different. These small horses could not be used for the traction of artillery pieces and heavy weapons. The mechanical traction vehicles could be used in Central Russia only on the two great roads; they favored only a reduced part of the front; none of them was within the Division's reach. Only in the last part of the withdrawal movement could one of them also be used by the division.

The above-mentioned question was resolved according to the experience gained at the front, in the sense that a great movement of retreat would have meant the destruction of the army. It would have reached the positions it was planned to occupy, after losing most of its artillery and heavy weapons, and for this reason it would no longer be able to wage a defensive struggle with any prospect of success. It was thus a resolution of the utmost significance that Hitler took, contrary to the proposal of the decisive persons around him, when he ordered that he should always hold a position as long as the situation in any way permitted it and that he could then only withdraw step by step. There cannot be the slightest doubt that by that resolution the army was saved and fighting power preserved as far as circumstances permitted. That success must have done much to heighten Hitler's awareness of his own ability in the military field.

On December 23 we arrived at Asanovo, a small village on the eastern edge of a wooded area 20 km wide and 15 km deep. The Division's mission was to hold the eastern edge of this large forest. To the north of the forest, in the Nava valley, there was a road along which two Divisions withdrew. To the south of the forest, on the flank that was still uncovered, were Russian forces. Through the center of the wooded area ran parallel to the Nava valley, a road which had formerly been a supply road and where the snow was not very deep. On both sides of that road the snow had accumulated to a great height; this obstacle and the virgin undergrowth beneath the tall trees precluded any movement off the road. Where the road finally came out of the forest and reached the open country again, there were two villages separated by a ravine, which had been occupied on the 25th by the Russians.

46. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

We stayed on December 24 and 25 in Asanovo. In such extraordinarily difficult circumstances we celebrated the Christmas holiday only in spirit. The uncertainty of the situation made the thought in mine, so far away, doubly melancholic. That sentimental and intimate celebration which in normal times aroused within us the memory of the past, was filled on that day also in a strong proportion with the thought of a difficult future.

For the continuation of the march on December 26, the Commander of the Army Corps had assigned the Division the road through the Nava Valley, following the two Divisions marching there. As this meant a big detour for the Division and it was very uncertain what day and time the other troops would finish passing through, I resolved to risk marching along the forest road encircled by the Russians. The Commander of the Army Corps could not order me to take such a risky attitude, leaving me free to act. As it was by no means certain that I would be able to get out of the forest to the west, a strong grouping was entrusted with the security of the exit to the east. The risk was successful. After several hours of marching, the vanguard reached the western exit and went on the attack along the road against the occupied villages. This attack, which could only be supported by a piece that came into position on the road at the edge of the forest, achieved its purpose after a short time. By nightfall the Division had left the wooded area behind.

It was extremely cold. As there were only a few small villages, the units that were not on security duty were densely packed, so that it was impossible to lie down or sit down. I myself was with six officers of my command in a small room, where the reception and transmission group of the radiotelegraph station was also working. During the Winter Battle, this form of accommodation of the units was no exception, which only provided protection against the cold and did not allow real rest, especially where there were only a few places or even if there were only a few places.

In such situations, I often thought of the beautiful directives on the fight against exanthematous fever, which recommended the avoidance of living quarters for the population. In such situations, I often thought of the beautiful directives on the fight against exanthematic fever, which recommended avoiding living quarters of the population.

In the villages located to the south there were Russian forces whose effectiveness we did not know. Already in the tactical actions of the last days we could see a surprising withheld attitude towards artillery ammunition and grenade launchers. We learned from prisoners that there was a great shortage of these kinds of ammunition; but we were unable to determine whether it was a production or supply crisis. This shortage continued for several weeks and was a great relief to us. In contrast to the Russians, we had abundant ammunition of all kinds, probably because we were withdrawing to our depots. Especially the artillery ammunition gave us a manifest superiority when the enemy attacked.

The numerous localities that we found after Christmas in the areas assigned to us allowed us, in order to take better care of the units that had suffered a lot from the cold, to renounce a defense in positions chosen according to tactical points of view and to establish the combat line within the range of the village borders, with occasional posts between the localities. This procedure had not been possible up to that time because in our belts there were only forests or areas with very few localities. In this way, the number of casualties due to freezing was considerably reduced, even though in January and February the cold became even more intense. Sufficient ammunition favored this procedure since too much was used to successfully beat the enemy who had infiltrated through the intervals. A combat procedure was thus developed which departed completely from the principles in force until then. It was imposed by necessity and favored by the high snow, which made any tactical movement of the enemy on the ground extremely difficult and often prevented it at all.

At the end of December we reached the great road leading from Kaluga to Moscow. The Division was directed by it southward to the extensive locality of Detschino. In this way it found itself again, for the most part, in the proper relationship within the framework of the general movement, from which it had been drawn by the overflowing operation of the Russians. At Detschino it finally made contact with the neighboring forces on the right which had fallen back through Kaluga and rejoined the infantry regiment and artillery group which

had hitherto been subordinate to another Division. From that locality onwards the movement was for some time again in a westerly direction, later occasionally also in a south-westerly direction. The exposed flank was now eliminated.

Snowfall in Russia is not uniformly heavy. Thus to the west of the Kaluga-Dets-Chinese highway we found an area about 20 km deep, mostly uncovered agricultural land, where the snow only reached a height of half a meter. And it was precisely here that the Army Command intended to interrupt the withdrawal movement for several days. Here there were large and numerous localities in exceptional proportion, often with surprisingly beautiful buildings.

Due to the closing of the large clearing on our right flank, the Russians were faced with new circumstances; they were now forced to attack frontally as the low snow height favored them.

The attacks lasted several days. They were carried out along the roads, so that their centers of gravity were automatically directed against the localities. Although the pressure was very intense and they produced several crises, the enemy did not succeed anywhere. Our superiority in artillery ammunition was decisive. In their reports to the higher authorities (which we picked up) the Russians always pointed out this superiority and also based on it their

failures. Otherwise we were able to gather from those combats several experiences on the conduct of attacks in the snow, which we were able to apply conveniently when we had to attack.

The Russians appeared at that time with ever-increasing forces, many of them newly created. After the enormous losses in personnel and material in the summer and autumn battles, this alone constitutes a great organic feat. But it is also the expression of a high force of spiritual resistance that allowed the Russian army to withstand the continuous defeats and retreats as well as the great losses of 1941 without losing its internal cohesion and even, after a short time and taking advantage of our weakness, to go on the offensive.

We have given much thought to that fact. It must be attributed in great part to the enormous magnitude of their space that the Russians in the year 1941 had not been beaten to annihilation, but that (except in the battles of pockets) they always knew how to subtract themselves again to the last decision. A very wide and deep space behind the soldiers who must retreat also strengthens their morale, while a limited space in a fight against a superior enemy depresses it. The political doctrines that had been instilled in the soldiers from a young age provided them with a great deal of support, as I have been able to verify in conversations with almost 200 privates and officers. Without ideology, no soldier performs extraordinarily well. From conversations with Russian soldiers I also recognized the iron imperative embodied in the commissar. After mature reflection I came to the conclusion that the commissars also have a great merit in preserving the internal firmness of the Russian army, so seriously threatened by the events of 1941.

Periods of resistance now alternated with days of retrograde marching until we reached, in the last week of January, the great Roslavl-Juchnow-Kaluga road. The Division marched along it a stretch westward to the eastern vicinity of the small town of Juchnow, from where it was moved northward; there it was to occupy a position passing through a number of favorably situated villages. The large road was the only supply road for the units fighting east of us in that area. The Russians followed behind us with a strong push to the south in order to reach the great road. The mission of the 52nd Division and the Division to the east of it was to prevent this.

The infantry strength had already diminished at that time to such an extent that a regiment had only two battalions, each with a combat strength of 160 to 180 men, and this could only be achieved by assigning to the combat units all the men from the major and baggage units who were not absolutely indispensable, using a rigorous criterion for this purpose. The sapper battalion had a strength similar to that of an infantry battalion; the artillery of the Division consisted of only 9 batteries with a total of 30 pieces. The sectors assigned to the units had to be almost always of the same width as before and often even wider, which in turn was only possible because of the support that the snow (by hindering movements) offered to the defense. An effective guarding of

48. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

the belts was particularly difficult during the night. Thus the Russians at the end of January, on a completely dark night, managed to break through by surprise into the village of Bolscheno, which lay along a road and which was in the Division's belt, and to dislodge the weak regiment defending that village. In this way they came to a dangerous proximity to the supply road, so that everything possible had to be done to recapture the locality. For this mission, as is natural, the forces of the Division alone were not sufficient and for this reason a regiment of another Division, which was of a higher strength than my own, was subordinated to me.

The villages located a few kilometers west and east of Bolscheno were occupied by German troops. All the localities were linked by well-trodden sledge roads. From the center

From Bolscheno a sledge road also led south. We were in an area where units of the rear service had been billeted a short time before. Outside the roads the snow was up to a meter thick; in the places where the wind-driven snow gathered and in the ravines it was even thicker. Two so-called regiments were to take the village by means of an attack. One regiment was hurried in a deep device on the road leading from the east to the village; the other, in analogous form, on the one leading from the south; the battalions were organized in several shock platoons. Also from the village to the west a strong shock platoon was to advance against Bolscheno. Each battalion was assigned a part of the locality fixed during the day and recognized by the respective chief, which it was to attack and take. The greatest difficulty lay in the narrowness of the sector to be attacked at first and then the necessary deployment in width from the deep but very narrow haste device. This required also to crush by fire the enemy sectors not attacked initially. This is a special feature of the attack in the high snow following the route of the roads. Despite the known disadvantages of a night attack, such an attack could only be carried out at night in order to hinder the concentration of enemy fire on the initially narrow fronts of the attacker. It was also necessary to count on the fact that some houses would be set on fire; but the experience indicated that then the illumination was limited exclusively to a very short distance and that the snow produced many misleading shadow effects on the ground and on the objects. On the other hand, it facilitated the orientation of the attacker.

The attack was set for 23:00. Almost all the batteries were able to cooperate; during the day they determined the bases for the firing so as not to attract attention. At the appointed time, the batteries opened fire on the town and its borders, and soon after, concentrated their fire on the places of breakthrough at the road junctions in the town and on its borders. At the green light signals launched by the infantry which, in the meantime, had approached, the fire moved on the locality and soon after to the road coming from the north.

The breakthrough was successful; in some parts of the village they fought at close range in the light of the burned houses; then the Russians fled northward. In the locality about 100 Russians were counted dead. The losses themselves were mainly wounded and amounted to about the same number, which was very sensitive given the reduced strength of the units. According to the account of a wounded officer taken prisoner, this combat must have been a severe test for the nerves of the defender; first of all the surprise night fire of artillery and grenade launchers on the locality, then during this fire the attack of the infantry, which could hardly be seen and which carried out an intense fire, the burning of the fire and the thought of the deep snow on the edge of the locality; he described all this as an inferno from which he was happily saved. We, however, would not remain long in the reconquered position.

9. Russia

The great lord commands. Rest of the units.

Balance of the winter crisis.

In the first week of February, the Russians had succeeded in making a narrow breakthrough southwest of Juchnow and advanced forces which at first were estimated at 2,000 men with guns, to a forest about 4 km. north of the breakthrough site; this forest reached the road from Smolensk through Juchnow which was the only supply road for the southern parts of the 4th Army. This forest reached the road from Smolensk through Juchnow, which was the only supply road for the southern parts of the 4th Army; the forest was 6 to 8 km long and almost 4 km wide and consisted of large foliage trees and conifers. The Russians thus prevented the supply for the units east of the breakthrough site.

That situation had to be cleared soon and my Division was ordered to do so. During the execution of a shortening of the front east of Juchnow, it was pulled out of position and directed to the area east of the Russian-occupied forest. The combat strength of the infantry, sappers, tank fighters and the scouting detachment of the division totaled 1,000 men. For the execution of the attack two artillery regiments were subordinated to me there as well as a motorized infantry regiment on the other side of the forest, which had a strength of 1,000 men. The situation was made extraordinarily difficult by the fact that, at the beginning of February, heavy snow fell again. The cold remained between -25° and -35°.

The enemy in the woods remained quiet. Only one piece was pulling from the western edge of the woods against the road when movement was noted on the road. It was February 9, 1942, when the Division became active. While reconnaissance began, the most important thing was to close the four kilometer wide clearing at the front. The battalion assigned for this purpose marched along a fairly well trodden road east of the forest to the vicinity of the front occupied by our troops and then turned west towards the breakthrough site. There, surprisingly, he found no enemy. The Russians were in the villages to the south of there and had done nothing to maintain liaison with the forces which, penetrating through the place of breakthrough, were now inside the forest to the north of it. Through the clearing passed the bottom of the hollow of the Lidija stream, frozen and snow-covered; over this stream ran a wide, well-trodden sledge road, on the edge of which were stretched several telephone wires, which constituted the only communication of the Russian forces in the forest with those to the south of our position. They were cut immediately.

The region was quite broken and had several ravines parallel to the creek, which had to be crossed and in which there were more than two meters of snow. Even though there was no enemy action, the battalion needed ten hours, from 20:00 to 06:00, to cover the four kilometers long stretch of the position to be closed. The snow was up to the men's chests. In the ravines some of them sank completely and had to be pulled out with ropes.

It was obvious that in this snowy situation it was not possible to carry out an infantry attack in the forest. It was necessary to narrow the enemy as much as possible, bringing him into a confined space, and then it was necessary to act first of all with artillery. The infantry, after repulsing the enemy's security fractions, was advanced from the east, west and south to near the edge of the forest and established itself there in snow cover. Daily, at a designated hour, it was made

The 30 batteries of the three artillery regiments would battle the forest according to a fixed plan. Then the infantry would reoccupy their positions and only at night would most of them withdraw to favorably situated villages. For eight days they proceeded in this way, independently of other events.

In the first few days we took prisoners from whose statements it was clear that the enemy had at least 3,000 infantrymen or half as strong as the Division, including the regiment that had been subordinated to it.

On the third day we managed, by a favor of chance, to decipher the three-digit code with which the Russian

50. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

radio stations worked. On that day the forces in the forest received from their army commander the order to hold. This order began with the words: "The Great Lord commands". The enemy attacked several times from the south the front in the Lidija depression with the obvious intention of establishing liaison with the forces inside the forest. Soon they felt a shortage of food and began to butcher their horses. New prisoners further clarified the situation. It turned out that there must be more than 4,000 men in the forest, belonging to two Divisions. The prisoners also spoke of two generals who were to be found in the forest.

The next day the enemy in the forest was ordered to break southward in order to rejoin his own forces. The time was set for 16:00. The enemy located to the south made a very violent attack at that hour, while the adversary in the forest, probably already by the fire of our artillery against his areas of preparation, was prevented from leaving because he did not make any attempt to attack. The following day a similar order was given for the exit, while the enemy to the south attacked again, also using tanks. We could appreciate the great mobility of the T-34 with its wide chains, also in the heavy snow. On the night of the seventh to eighth day, two T-34 tanks passed through our southern front in the direction of the forest and returned the next day, around dawn, through another place. Our troops were powerless against them; they had no anti-tank defense, for the only effective weapons against the T-34 tanks at that time, the 5 cm. anti-tank guns, could only be dragged, because of their weight, by mechanical traction and due to the deep snow only much later could they be advanced to appropriate positions in the front area and after extensive preparatory work which demanded the employment of many forces.

The night before the ninth day finally arrived. There were numerous elements of judgment to infer that the Russians were then going to make a great attempt at sortie. Before dawn they actually undertook an advance in dense masses from the forest to the south; but they reached the area of the intense fire of our machine guns and dispersed backwards into the forest. With them penetrated into the forest also parts of our infantry from the south, which were joined by shock platoons from the west and east. The Russians who were in immediate contact with our troops surrendered; they were followed by those who were closer and so on until they were all taken prisoner.

A great surprise was caused by the unexpectedly high number of enemy troops in the forest. When we counted them, they turned out to be 4,000 prisoners, 2,000 dead and 400 wounded; the booty included 96 pieces of artillery and grenade launchers. From these figures I deduced that not only because of the snow but also because of the enemy's strength, our conduct of the combat was justified, although it required considerable time and the army forces located to the east of the place of irruption were already beginning to feel intensely the suspension of supply from the rear. Our own losses were very small; however, there were again a number of frostbite, as we still lacked winter clothing.

The interrogation of the numerous prisoners, among whom were hundreds of officers, showed that the forces in the forest consisted of a part of the infantry of the artillery of three Divisions. The remainder of the units and the most indispensable baggage must have followed the

This was prevented by the closing of the clearing on our front. The lack of baggage soon originated the well-known crisis of subsistence. As for ammunition, only the ammunition in the guns of the pieces and that which each man carried with him was available. Nothing could be known about the intention of the forces that had penetrated into the forest. On that occasion, we also learned that the two tanks that crossed the front on the night before the eighth day, took the two generals out of the bag.

The prisoners belonged to numerous Russian villages, with their characteristic features. The officers, for the most part, were of a rough, almost peasant type. Among them were also some of manifestly elegant appearance, with sharp-profile faces. The officers and troops were very well equipped for the winter.

From the stories that the officers and NCOs told about the internal life in the army, it could be deduced that the institution of the commissars was about to disappear. There were already groups without commissars. One reason for this was certainly a gradual imposition of the current against commissars, a current which many prisoners had already linked with the name of Marshal Tymoshenko in the past. On the other hand, the ranks of the commissars had thinned out greatly in the fights of 1941; also the casualties of officers were very high.

These circumstances, and the great need for officers for the reorganization of the groupings that participated in the Winter Battle, led to the fact that commissars with war experience were appointed as officers and directly entrusted with command posts.

For us it was a novelty that surprised us, that the officers received food supplements in the form of butter, fat, chocolate and cigarettes. This was completely contrary to our principles as well as to the initial principles of the Russians. Privates openly expressed their displeasure to us in the conversations we had with them. In any case, the better situation of the officers as far as food was concerned is not a means for cementing or raising their authority or for the preservation of a good spirit in the troop.

The Russian break in the forest that gave rise to these fights shows very clearly the transcendental influence that the deep snow exerts on the conduct of the combat.

The direction chosen by the adversary was operationally very good and would have been very effective if it could have been tactically exploited; but this was only possible to a limited extent, owing to the snow which hindered movement off the beaten track. However, an energetic and clearly aimed drive into the woods might, at least, have seriously threatened one of our combat groupings encircling the woods, for each of these was, as we now saw it, far inferior to the probable effective available infantry forces of the adversary and would hardly be in a position to support one of the other two. There was no such driving in the woods. It did not even prove capable of making a break to the south in combination with the Russian forces south of our position.

In the attitude of the Russians in the forest, the command of the army on which they depended, from which they were ordered at first only to hold their ground, i.e. to adopt only a passive attitude, is undoubtedly also largely to blame. The passage of the order: "The Great Lord commands" allows us to deduce that the supreme authorities were also concerned with this situation, even if it does not reveal the thoughts they may have had. The company seemed to me to be the fruit of not very well thought-out thinking.

The impression also had to be gathered that the Russian leadership had not taken the snow into account. Without the snow it would not have been possible to maintain in any way our entire combat front west of Juchnow, due to the reduced strength of the units. Without snow an adversary with the strength at that time would have penetrated into the forest so often mentioned, would have been able to overrun a large part of the front and would have created, in general, an extremely dangerous situation.

Shortly after the end of the fight, I walked through the forest that had been the objective of all our efforts for so long. Here I unexpectedly received a grotesque and gruesome impression. There was a lot of snow on both sides of the road through the middle of the forest to the south. Platoons of prisoners were searching here with sticks and canes for fallen men and weapons. The dead that they found, which were rigidly frozen, were placed vertically leaning against the trees, so that they could be found more easily for further transport. I thus saw, as I traveled through the forest along that road, on its edge and as far as the eye could see, hundreds of dead, leaning against the trees; their faces deformed by grief, or smiling or calmly disposed; their arms in every possible position. Dürer's painting "Danse Macabre" seemed to have become here a numb reality.

Despite my displeasure, I had to continue on my way, for I wanted to tour the camp of a Russian infantry regiment further south. It consisted of a series of huts that had been built of branches around which snow had accumulated. The huts were so close together that one grenade must have hit several at the same time.

I was particularly struck by the fact that a camp had been built exclusively for officers, quite separate from the regimental troops. We knew that at the beginning the officers' situation in the Soviet Army did not have the authority that they have in the other armies and that in general it was a rather subordinate situation. But we also learned at that time that the leadership of the Russian Army was making efforts to improve the situation of the officers. For us the solution of wanting to raise the authority and status of the officers by billeting them together and independently of their units, even in the midst of fighting, was incomprehensible. We saw in it a measure as erroneous as the allocation of better food.

The 52nd Division relieved for some time the Division, behind which it was during the fighting for the forest. That Division had found on its arrival trenches which had been constructed during the early autumn

52. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

fighting and had improved them with snow parapets. The construction of shelters for living quarters in the position was also well advanced. Thus we finally had a position that also provided us with protection from the cold. After the end of the fighting through the forest, the enemy in front of the front remained quiet. Also at that time the salient front, in the form of a pocket, east of Juchnow on the Ugra was withdrawn to positions west of that small town.

After a few weeks we had to change positions with a Division that was on the Ugra north of the big road. The river runs here with many meanders, to the northeast, so that we were facing southeast. That position was also already well organized and also had good billets; only the adversary was still quite active, so the higher command expected attacks here, which was the reason for the change of Divisions.

In this new sector I found myself for the first time in Russia in a region that did not appeal to me in any way. I thought I could explain this to myself because here the hand of man had intervened in the picture of nature in an extremely inorganic way. The proximity of the great highway would have been the cause of extensive clearing here. The straight line drawn through hills and small streams and the new boundaries seemed contrary to nature. It seemed as if the spirit of a mechanical idiosyncrasy, foreign to its spirit, was being imposed on a spontaneous nature. It is surprising how much unnatural human planning can bring into the picture of nature. It is true that not infrequently we can also see this, albeit to a small extent, in Central Europe when the style of a house or the color of the tiles of a roof or of its exterior walls ruins the most beautiful picture of a landscape. Here

The same was true, although the measures were grandiose, as so often seen in Russia.

Our animosity against this region was increased by the fact that we found ourselves here in the part of the Russian territory with the greatest exanthematic fever and malaria, so that we watched with concern the approach of spring, the season most conducive to the first of these epidemics. And while almost everywhere in Russia we had hitherto met sympathetic men, here there was a predominant Mughal type of small stature, with protruding cheekbones and slanting eyes. These men were at the same time of an extremely suspicious nature. Anyone who wanted to form a judgment about Russia on the basis of this region would make great mistakes.

The weak troops of the units, thanks to the better conditions existing, recovered from the untold sufferings and efforts of the previous two months of the hardest winter in Russia for the last fifty years. About 500 reestablished ones rejoined the Division; we consider them again as the most valuable increase in strength. Before spring we received in addition, at last, about 2,000 men as replacements as well as horses and parts for artillery, machine guns and grenade launchers. Part of the automatic guns came from the booty taken from the Russians. In the regiments, the battalions could be re-formed to three companies. The artillery regiment was also able to complete its batteries and re-create some that had been disbanded. These tasks and the unification of the replacements with the old nuclei caused the units a great deal of supplementary work.

The Division was thus gradually acquiring a large part of its former combat power; but it was still far short of its normal strength. The shortage of officers continued to be felt very sensibly. The losses of officers were too great to be ever satisfactorily replaced.

At the beginning of February the great crisis of the army in the Winter Battle could be considered to have been averted. The loss of ground compared with the gain in the year 1941 was by no means very great and was at any rate bearable if it was appreciated as a setback in the course of operations of the greatest extent, the more so since the most important part of the industrial and raw material areas of European Russia remained in our power. We were then concerned with the great problem of how this war could be continued with prospects of final success. According to the prevailing views, victory could only be achieved by the annihilation of the enemy's forces or by measures which would take away the enemy's possibility of fighting, as was the case with the Central Powers in 1918. That the Russians had not been annihilated in the battles of the summer and autumn of 1941 was proved by the Battle of Winter, even to those who did not want to accept it.

The successes of the Russians in the winter must be attributed not so much to their superiority as to the special situation already outlined of the German army and to the circumstances created by that season.

Everything now depended on the measures which the Reich government had adopted for the conduct of a war of the utmost proportions or which it had in preparation. The magnitude and details of the measures in execution or planned were at that time unknown to us. We knew, it is true, that influences detrimental to the armed forces were still working imperturbably so that the human potential would be employed in a wrong direction. This gave rise to many doubts about the thorough study and effectiveness of the totality of measures for the purposeful conduct of the war, and aroused great concern for the future. Only the full completion of the existing operational units with men, weapons and vehicles and the creation of new ones would have placed the army in a position to wage a decisive struggle with prospects of success. In order to complete this picture, I will express in advance that also afterwards no total measures were taken which would have allowed the search for a decision and that in the future it had to be limited only to relatively small actions.

The objectives of these small companies, which were certainly set excessively broad and far-reaching, usually achieved only limited results, and sometimes not even these.

An explanation for this may perhaps be found in the once again completely erroneous assessment of the Russians by the Chief of Staff of the Army Colonel General Halder which is evident from the following entry in the war diary of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) of April 19, 1942:

"In the briefing on the situation, the Chief of the Army General Staff deduced from the many enemy groupings that had appeared on the eastern front for the first time since November 1941, that the Russians had made the extreme efforts and had already consumed an essential part of their available forces."

Parallel to this development, the old-fashioned and unthinking layman's tactics of the air battle against England were applied, which could not be compensated by the heroic performance of the aircrews either. In addition, the misguided leadership of the Luftwaffe, which neglected fighter planes in favor of bombing in the decisive years, contrary to the requests of the army as early as the spring of 1942, soon led to catastrophic consequences for the interior and the army. At that time Hitler still allowed himself to be impressed by the self-confident exterior and the halo surrounding Göring, and there was no one there to guide and enlighten him.

These decisive flaws were recognized in a timely manner by numerous people at the front, so that there would have been time to remedy them. But the relations of power and influence existing at the time precluded the possibility of bringing these reflections with energy and prospects of success to the supreme authority. Our state of mind was best characterized by the quotation from Herodotus that the English General Fuller transcribed in his "Memoirs of an outspoken military man". More than 2,500 years ago, Herodotus has a person say the following words:

"No one believes in warnings, however sound they may be. Many of us Persians know the danger; but necessity compels us to do all that our Conductor commands. Truly the most terrible of all evils is to know much, and yet have no authority to proceed."

10. Russia

Spring mud and partisans. Bombs over Bryansk. Unsuccessful attack on Suchinitschi.

The demands of the present were increasingly imperative in our daily life. It was thus of great importance to adopt preventive measures for the maintenance of the most indispensable traffic in the area of the units and baggage during the coming period of mud as the snow melted in the spring. The roads to be maintained were determined and tree trunks with a diameter of about 25 centimeters and the length of the width of the planned trail were deposited on their sides. With them, when the snow began to melt, the embankments of fajinas were to be built over the roads, which are the only ones that allow the traffic of vehicles in the period of the mud. Obtaining the logs and, later, the construction of the embankments required so many arms that every available man from the major planes, units and baggage had to be employed.

In Russia, spring mud exceeds autumn mud in depth and because it lasts a few weeks longer. The soil disintegrates and moistens to a depth of 1.25 meters due to the previous freezing and melting. We had the disappointment that even the apparently firm road on which the supplies for the army mass were transported, could not withstand the great demands of the traffic. After a short time, there were cracks up to half a meter deep in large stretches caused by the trucks and finally cuts a meter wide and deep. Here, too, the construction of embankments was the only solution to prevent the road from becoming completely unusable.

The enemy in the Ugra was quite active, but the expected large-scale attack did not take place. We, too, carried out numerous actions in which the replacements gathered valuable experience. In spite of this, the months spent in this position were the longest period in which the Division enjoyed some rest.

In the rear area there were numerous partisans. They were a danger to traffic and also attacked localities occupied by small numbers of baggage. They undertook several treacherous hand strikes in the area behind the front.

On one occasion, towards the end of winter, a partisan wearing the uniform and badge of a German field gendarme stopped a car occupied by three officers and the driver. The regulations in force prescribed compliance with the signals and indications of the field gendarmes. At the moment the vehicle stopped, the false gendarme directed the fire of his automatic pistol on the occupants, who suspected nothing, of whom three were killed and one seriously wounded.

On another occasion, in a different area, a partisan in the uniform of a field gendarme gave a small supply column the signal to turn onto a side road, which happened not infrequently in traffic regulation. Not far from the abandoned road, the column fell into a partisan ambush, all the drivers being killed or seriously wounded. The regulations for the field gendarmerie were immediately changed. Also in our rear area it was necessary to carry out frequent undertakings against partisan-occupied regions in order to always clear them again.

The period of mud, which made life in the trenches especially difficult, lasted until the end of May. After that the ground dried out very quickly. In the spring about 100 men fell ill.

The first cases of exanthematous typhoid were reported among the men, among them an officer of the Division Command, despite all precautions having been taken. At the beginning of the mosquito flight, every man was given a daily tablet of atepirin as a prophylaxis against malaria; but this disease only appeared in isolated cases.

The summer began rather abruptly with high temperatures, which quickly awakened the vegetation. In the fields and meadows I found the same kinds of flowers as in our country, only their colors were incomparably duller, even in midsummer. The poppy was not bright red and the centauries were light blue; an even more celestial color presented the cloudless sky. Here, as in the areas we reached the previous year, there were few songbirds. As everywhere else, there were large numbers of crows. With surprising frequency the bluebird

could be seen in its beautiful dark blue plumage. Nowhere in Central Russia did we see game animals, if one dispenses with a few hares.

Our task in the Ugra ended in the first days of July. At that time the Division was taken from the front and in several days' march was to reach Roslavl, a small town situated on the big road, west of the Desna. The troops on foot and the hypo-mobile parts were to be embarked there to be transported by rail to Bryansk. The mission incumbent upon us there was not known; in any case, time did not seem to be pressing.

A day's march before Roslavl, there was an extensive forest that reached the road; from there numerous partisans interrupted traffic and raided nearby villages. In conjunction with parts of an Armored Division that would penetrate the forest from the north, the Division was to search the forest and clear it. We encountered only a few partisan groups, rather small in number, who resisted to the last man. A rather scattered camp was discovered, for about 100 men, which was very skillfully masked. It consisted of a series of pits about two meters deep, well dug, in which there was room for five or six men; they were covered with thin tree trunks, which had a layer of natural forest soil over them in order to hide them. The excavated earth must have been carried a great distance, for nowhere was any trace of it seen. We found here considerable quantities of ammunition, explosives and hand grenades as well as several machine guns and rifles.

This task detained us for several days; then we continued on to Roslavl. As I crossed the Desna by the bridge, thoughts came to my mind about the passage of this river in October of the previous year 50 km further south in the opposite direction. This closed a circle that encompassed a series of combats, dangers, hardships or impressions. On the one hand, it was a source of great satisfaction to my conscience to have met all these trials in difficult situations, which means an impulse for the future and an increase in self-confidence. The same feeling was aroused by the conviction that I had gained valuable experience in the knowledge of men, both my own and my enemies, as well as of my own person and my attitude in various situations and in the face of difficult resolutions. On the other hand, the conviction that much depends on luck, increases our circumspection and modesty. But especially I also thought of the unprecedented performances of each of the officers and soldiers of my units and found it painful not to be able to do justice to each one, at least by my recognition. Even if each was known within his frame of action and honored as a personality, in the army as a whole, with few exceptions, he must necessarily be an unknown soldier. I was convinced that almost every soldier knew this. And it is one of the great mysteries of men, especially of the soldier's soul, that they were brave fighters with the utmost spirit of sacrifice and generally did more than their duty. Although in my memory many and many names are always coming back, I will only rarely mention them for fear of committing a
injustice to those omitted.

Because of its surroundings, situation and kind of buildings, Roslavl was the locality of some magnitude that least attracted me of those I met in Russia. We stayed here for a day until the first units were embarked, and then moved on by the very good road to Bryansk.

As there was an area frequented by partisans halfway, the trip was made in a column formed by the motorized units of the Division. At the head was a mine search vehicle. About 10 km before Briansk a truck turned onto a side road at a good speed; it evidently wanted to get ahead of our long column of vehicles. It was still in sight when an explosion occurred underneath it. A rear wheel of the vehicle was torn off by a mine, evidently weak; the driver and passenger were unhurt. Two more mines were found in the immediate vicinity by the minesweeper. At the spot on the road where they were laid, a wheel track had been simulated with the help of an old tire, which was also found in the vicinity. Thus we learned here a new partisan trick.

We were surprised by the beautiful location of the city of Bryansk, whose buildings stand on the eastern bank of the Desna on a rather steep ravine and are surrounded by lots of green lawns. The core of the city features numerous modern residences; their environments were almost all very small. The Desna is already here a river of a respectable width and was spanned by a high wooden bridge that also passed over the railroad station buildings on the lower western bank.

Shortly after arrival in Bryansk I was ordered to assemble the Division in the area around Shisdra, which is

56. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

about 30 kilometers north of that city. The transports were directed as close as possible to that area. I resolved to remain in Bryansk the day after our arrival. On the first evening I wanted to inspect an advertised transport and went over the big bridge to the station. At the station there was a supply train to which had been added the saddle horses of the Division Command and, as we were to learn later, contrary to regulations, two ammunition trains. It had just become dark and I was with my adjutant in the station building with the station commander, when a Russian airman appeared and set fire with bombs to several piles of straw on the edge of the station beach. The station was immediately clearly illuminated. Shortly afterwards a group of three bombers appeared and hit the station with 50-kilogram bombs. With an interval of a few minutes, similar groups followed for more than an hour.

We had just taken shelter in a ditch when the air pressure produced by a powerful explosion took our breath away. Several ammunition wagons had been blown up. This was followed by the uninterrupted explosion of isolated grenades as the shelling continued. The station commander led us from deck to deck to the masonry house he inhabited, about 100 yards away, the windowless wall of which faced the station. Here we spent most of the night. The explosions from the grenades continued for several hours after the end of the bombardment. On our return we found many stones on the bridge which constituted a danger to the tires.

Two men on the ammunition train were casualties of the air raid; otherwise there were only a few wounded, all slight. Most of our horses were killed or wounded; a portion of the tracks were destroyed and the station burned. The switching plant and two tracks had been unscathed, so that the transports could continue. The Russians had dropped 600 bombs. The brave engineer of the second ammunition train had driven his train out of the station immediately after the first bombs were dropped and thus avoided further misfortune. The expected transport train had stopped before the station.

The road to Shisdra passed, for the most part, through beautiful scenery through an old high forest. Again we had to move in a long column of vehicles, as this region was also the refuge of numerous partisans. In the forest there were several clearings in which there were well-preserved villages inhabited by a beautiful and lively type of men. Also the locality of Shisdra, in which we stayed, produced a pleasant impression. It had some multi-storied masonry buildings of bygone times and tastefully built and well-preserved wooden houses; in almost all of them there were gardens. Here the wooded area ended and open land continued, with agricultural fields and numerous hollows with marshes. About 20 kilometers away was our front. The units of the Division were billeted in the very precarious villages north of Shisdra, because some nights this locality was overflown by isolated bombing planes.

The Division was soon to receive a new assignment. We had the impression that it was to be only temporary. To the north was an Armored Division whose missing tanks and parts had not been replaced; its strength was also reduced. It had been forced by a Russian tank attack to withdraw from that part of its position which passed over a treeless hill; it was now a short distance further south, on the edge of a forest in front of which was a swampy hollow. In another part of that Division's front, the enemy had broken into a narrow forest about 4 miles deep, isolated, and had established himself there with the strength of a regiment. I had to remind myself of a very similar situation in the Lidiya depression in February of that year, the difference being that the breakthrough then had been of much greater proportions.

It was now the intention of the Army Corps Command to employ my Division in the counterattack with the object of recapturing the lost positions of the Armored Division. I managed to convince the Corps Command and the Army Command that the new position of the Armored Division was much more favorable than the old one because of the security against tanks offered by the swampy terrain in front of it, so that the thought of a counterattack, whose realization would only respond to reasons of prestige, was abandoned. The troops that had penetrated the forest were instead to be dislodged. Two battalions closed the clearing in the position one morning and then attacked the forest from the north, i.e. from the direction from which the Russians had come. After several hours the enemy was overpowered and left an astonishing 1,600 prisoners in our possession. In the forest itself several hundred light earthen forts in defensible condition were won, most of which had to be conquered in hand grenade fights. The Division then took over for about eight days the positions of the

Armored Division, which was reorganized during that time.

This ended the Division's activity in that region; at the end of July it was moved some 30 kilometers further east and thus arrived in the vicinity of the area where it was to perform a very difficult task.

I was soon informed of the new plans. The incoming - westward - part of the front from the region west of Juchnow to east of Shisdra was to be rectified by a pincer offensive from both projections; from the area west of Juchnow and from that east of Shisdra; both attacks were to be made in the direction of Suchinitschi. By means of this offensive a considerable shortening of the front could be achieved at the same time.

It was intended to carry out the attack from both directions with large forces. In the area east of Shisdra an armored corps was assembled for the purpose, consisting of four Armored Divisions and the 52nd Infantry Division. Shortly afterwards it was learned that the forces intended for the attack from the area west of Juchnow had to be fully employed to dislodge the enemy forces which had made large breakthroughs further north and were no longer available for the planned operation. Nevertheless, the attack on Suchi was to be made. nitschi by the Armored Corps from the area east of Shisdra.

This was until then the first operation in whose success I did not believe. The cause of this doubt lay, first of all, in the fact that the Russians, after the suppression of one of the arms of the originally projected pincer, were in a position to employ all available forces against an isolated attack from the front. To this was added the tactical consideration that the attack grouping was too weak in infantry in consideration of the terrain furrowed by watercourses and marshy stretches and covered by isolated woods. This operation, as well as several others, is very instructive for the problem of combat in Russia of a force composed for the most part of armored troops.

The enemy positions were on the north bank of the Resseta, a small stream whose banks had swampy stretches. This stream had already been violently fought over the previous year, and the terrain had changed hands several times. In the vicinity of both banks there were still a large number of mines from that time. While the greater part of the attack terrain was only in some places covered with clumps of trees and thickets and had a few villages, the western part of it consisted of a dense wooded area about 15 kilometers deep and 8 kilometers wide. Through the more open terrain the Armored Divisions were to attack; but, as this attack could be broken through from the wooded area on the left, this too was to be attacked and taken. This task was carried out by my Division. At a distance of 15 km. behind the enemy positions ran the Shisdra, in a course perpendicular to the direction of attack. The Armored Divisions had to gain as the first objective of attack various passage points on that stream and the 52nd Division the northern edge of the forest.

Aerial photography showed in the open terrain several enemy lines, situated one behind the other, and up to a depth of 10 kilometers, numerous large nests that crossed each other, while in the forest it did not provide any information. The attempt to explore the forest on the ground failed in the face of the solid wire fences on the edge of the forest, defended by the Russians. As the Russians had been in their positions since winter, it had to be admitted that there were also powerful fortifications inside the forest.

In the cool foggy morning of August 16 the attack against the forest began; at the same time the Armored Divisions started their advance. The Division's attack was carried out by two regiments in the front line, while the third was still being held back. The units collided inside the forest with a position constituted by forts covered with thick trunks and with earth of a thickness of more than one meter, against which nothing could do even the light anti-tank guns and grenade launchers. The regiment on the left reached an area of swamps whose crossing would only have been possible with heavy losses and after overcoming many difficulties.

I immediately suspended the attack on that regiment and moved it behind the regiment on the right; the latter, after about two hours, had taken in its attack belt the first line of forts. The conquest of this line, in which each blockhouse had to be taken by means of close fighting with hand grenades, while the flank fire of the neighboring blockhouses was prevented with its own fire, after having crossed wide barbed wire fences, was again a magnificent feat of the units.

We collided in the forest with seven of these positions. Since from the third position it was not possible to support the second, the regiment attacked this position from the flank and began to overwhelm it. It thus moved so far to the left that the previous regiment on the left could be employed again at the front in place of it.

58. *Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic*

Thus, after about five hours after the attack had begun, the two front line regiments had mutually exchanged their sashes. This curious and unique case was only possible in the woods, but it was also only the result of a firm and safe conduct by the chiefs of regiment and battalion and with units that even in situations that could not be covered by sight, were in the hand of their commanders. Until the coming of darkness we had penetrated about 5 kilometers into the forest. The tanks had arrived a little further on.

The next morning the attack was continued; by noon the seven enemy positions had been taken. The infantry was about 8 to 10 kilometers deep in the superb forest of foliage trees when the thicket began to take on the density of a rush. The enemy had no more positions; but his effective was extraordinarily high. We took several hundred prisoners from four Divisions and, in the further course, from two more Divisions. From their statements we soon deduced that parts of three to four Russian Divisions dislodged by our tanks, had retreated into the forest. The mission of the 52nd Division had now become extremely difficult. The 3rd Regiment, too, had been employed long before. In the dense undergrowth it came to violent fighting at close quarters. We pushed the Russians back step by step. One part retreated to the west, where along the edge of the forest ran the Resseta, which is narrow but very deep there. On its western bank, the Russians after our break in their lines had organized a new front which we now had to take also into account, as it was immediately on our flank.

The support of the infantry by the artillery in the forest was, naturally, very limited. Their fire was directed from the front line by liaison platoons and was very effective and demoralizing, especially on the second day, for the enemy crowded in the northern half of the forest, which meant a sensible relief for the infantry. At dusk the northern edge of the forest was reached and with it the first objective of attack. The Armored Divisions had reached the Shisdra which bordered on the north the field of attack; but it was too late to fight for possession of the points of passage over that stream. The Division Command was billeted in the village of Scheljabowo on the eastern edge of the forest.

The next day the tanks were to force the passage of the Shisdra, while the 52nd Division was to remain in the places reached. In the evening it rained for three hours. The consequence was that the artillery tractors of the Armored Divisions' artillery and motorized gun carriages could not move on the heavy clay soil during the whole of the third day. The ground was slippery as if soaked with oil. The attack was called off. We thus experienced a typical example of how the highly technical means of combat depended in Russia on the weather and the ground.

I was able to examine without haste the organization of the Russian defense of the forest. Every position was composed of a set of fighting forts, built with small intervals between them. Each blockhouse was manned by 4 to 8 men with 2 to 3 machine guns. The lesser forts had a single machine gun. All were covered by several layers of thick tree trunks, on top of which there was about one meter of earth. They had the entrance at the rear; in front and on the flanks there were loopholes for firing. The approach was intercepted by a low wire fence. Nearly 3,000 such forts were counted, of which the greater part were taken in fighting. The road leading through the forest was heavily mined; on both sides were deposits of mines which had been erected by our sappers. The Russians who at the beginning of the war used mines in tin boxes, later used wooden containers, which were not denounced by our minesweeping materials. Shortly after that we used very sensitive mine-hunting instruments which still detected the metal detonating capsules of the mines; only with their help we could recognize the existence of mines in wooden boxes.

On the fourth day the Armored Divisions fought for the Shisdra Pass. In their possession fell also a bridge which could not be blown up by the Russians, as it was continuously under fire from our machine guns. The tanks managed to penetrate into the large forest on the other side of the stream, but failed to take it; this was not possible without strong infantry. This was not possible without strong infantry. had planned, because we did not attack from the area west of Juchnow, the Russians were able to employ all their reserves against our attack. On that day the enemy proved to be so strong that a continuation of the attack presented no prospect of success. The attack gradually stalled. After some time the armored troops were withdrawn behind the stream. The position had been advanced about 15 km by the attack; but the line reached

was not favorable for defense. There was also the question concerning the position of my Division to be settled, whether the defense should be effected on the edge of the forest or in the interior of the forest. The latter solution was chosen, especially because of the new Russian line in front of the western edge of the forest. In the open ground that followed on the right, a position was recognized in a very favorable situation several kilometers behind the line reached. Its construction was immediately begun, with the employment of numerous forces, so that it could soon be occupied. In that circumstance the Armored Divisions were taken out of the bridge and my Division had to take over, on September 20, the position in the former tank attack field, while the defense of the forest was entrusted to an infantry Division which had just arrived in this area.

The units were glad to get out of the forest thicket, where there was always only a strange dim light, as no sunbeam could penetrate the dense foliage of the trees. For this reason he could not find an explanation for the luxuriant development of the thicket. He always breathed a sigh of relief when he left the greenish gloom of the forest and returned to the open country. For horses the forest was dangerous because there was a kind of fly in it which we saw nowhere else and whose bite produced large blisters with pus. If they appeared in the parts where the saddle or tack goes, the horses could not be used for several weeks.

The Russians were approaching our positions; they adapted to the new situation and remained inactive. Along with the improvement of the positions, mainly in lodging forts, obstacles, minefields and communication trenches, we worked with special intensity on the construction of embankments, because the autumn mud period was to be expected in a few weeks and we knew what it meant.

Although the failure of the offensive on Suchinitshi had been foreseen by some, it nevertheless aroused anxious feelings, for it became evident that the Supreme Command had only a few divisions at its disposal for an operation which was aimed at a very favorable rectification of a large sector of the front, since it would economize forces. It was also incomprehensible that such an operation should also be carried out when with the suppression of the attack from the Juchnow area one of the most important preconditions for success disappeared. In any case, it could be deduced from all this that a manifest reinforcement of the army had not yet been reached. My Division had received no new replacements beyond those who arrived in the early spring, and could not constitute itself into what it formerly was.

The more I reflected on the military aspect of the conduct of this war, the clearer it became to me that this conduct in both belligerents had taken forms contrary to the principles of classical strategy. The principles were regarded by us as unshakable and only in their fulfillment did we see the possibility of producing the decision of a war by fighting. According to them, the objective of strategy is the annihilation of the adversary's fighting forces. To achieve this goal, the mass of forces must be employed in a decisive struggle.

Before the IGM the forces taking part were, in comparison with the extent of a theater of war, so small that it was not possible to dominate all the territory not held by the enemy. The space was dominated in those times to the extent required exclusively by the operations, in which the mass of the forces was employed and whose objective was the annihilation of the enemy. Reflections on the conduct of war at the time aroused in the This always again thoughts of Julius Caesar, Napoleon and Moltke.

In the IGM one of the consequences of the considerably increased armies was the formation of closed fronts, which extended over the entire length of the theater of war.

In World War II, shortly after the major operations of 1941, analogous measures were taken on both sides in the east, resulting in a continuous front which, finally, after the conquests in Southern Russia in 1942, stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea for an enormous length of 2,000 kilometers. The main part of the forces was employed by both belligerents for the formation of this front. During 1942 brought the complete completion of this system and already showed its decisive disadvantages. That large front was not suitable as a whole as well as in its parts for a decision-seeking offensive. Its main efficiency resided in the seizure of the mass of the enemy fighting forces; it was also in charge of the security of the flanks; as long as the front itself was not broken.

On the German side this defense against attacks made by local forces six or even ten times superior required at the beginning relatively reduced reserves as long as the front had a certain repulsive power, that is to say, as

60. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

long as the strips assigned to the Divisions were not too big. I will say here in advance that in 1943 this was no longer the case in many parts of the eastern front. The enormous amount of forces necessary for great decisive offensive operations (as such the German offensives of the summer of 1942 in Southern Russia cannot be considered as such) already since 1942 could not be gathered any more, because precisely the extensive front absorbed the mass of the forces and because, at least on the German side, no new important forces were organized.

Both belligerents were under the spell of the continuous front and were unable, again anticipating the events, to find the way for decisive operations. For the Russians this applies only until after the summer battles of 1944. By that time the German front had lost its repulsive power because of insufficient replacement of casualties and poor augmentation with newly organized groupings, as well as the need for forces for the western front. On the other side the Russians had permanently sent to their front the required replacement personnel and had created a great number of new groups so that, at the end, they reached that numerical superiority that allowed them the passage to the operation, at least in wide regions of the east.

11. Russia

Commanding General of the XXXV Army Corps. In the Orel area. First repercussions of Stalingrad.

It arrived on October 23, 1942. That day I received the communication of my appointment as commander of the XXXV Army Corps with the directive to take over as soon as possible. His sector was in the right wing of the 2nd Armored Army, in the Orel area, that is, far to the south.

The farewell of the 52nd Division was difficult for me like no other of those I had to take with some frequency later on, due to my different postings. The Division, which in a tireless work of the officers and troops had reached a particularly high level of training in France, later achieved in Russia, in attack and defense, maximum performance, like few other operational units of the army. Only a heroic song, worthy of the epics of ages long past, could carry the news of the heroism of the individual men in the Battle of Winter. What devotion and loyalty there was in the souls of those men and what steadfastness and courage in their hearts! When I talked with them in the trenches, on the marches or in the billet I found them simple, sober and full of that true humor that "nevertheless laughs." How often I was touched by the smiling modesty of these officers who were great soldiers and masters of the fight and who saw in their prowess only something that went without saying. It was a manifestly personal relationship that I had found in the Division I led for two years. The men knew that I did everything in my power to care for them and to help them. It was loyalty for loyalty that was given here. The separation was thus difficult. I left on October 24. The rainy, gray morning added to the melancholy of parting.

Once again, a portal to uncertainty was opening.

The headquarters of the 2nd Armored Army was in Orel, so this city was my first objective. The journey of more than 200 kilometers long was mostly on a good artificial road, in spite of the muddy period. We crossed mainly agricultural fields, alternating with large forests. We passed through several villages as well as the small town of Bolchoff. We then reached Orel, a town of about 30,000 inhabitants, beautifully situated on a slightly undulating terrain on both sides of the Oka. I was back here again on the river which we reached just a year before, when we occupied in the Protva the position situated furthest east and by its width of 200 meters formed a good flank support of the 52nd Division, as long as it did not freeze over. In Orel the Oka is only about 50 meters wide.

The most noteworthy thing I gathered from the information of the Commander-in-Chief of the 2nd Armored Army was that the expanses were extraordinarily large and that there was a lack of reserves in the army and in the Corps. The army front was considered to be manifestly quiet. Since the end of the Winter Battle 1941-1942 there had not been a large-scale tactical action here. The number of Russian Divisions employed at the front was only 50 percent greater than ours. In large reserves it had been ascertained that the enemy had, in addition to several rifle divisions, the 3rd Armored Army, which was in the Tula area, some 80 kilometers behind the front. Even without counting this army, the Russians in front of the sector of the German 2nd Armored Army had reserves more than twice as large as ours. In the Russian 3rd Armored Army, according to what was appreciated at that time, there were from 600 to 800 tanks. The German 2nd Armored Army at the same time consisted only of foot units and had no tanks.

According to the data I had on other sectors of the eastern front, the troop ratios were approximately the same almost everywhere, being in several even more unfavorable. From this situation it will be easy to deduce at what a quite different pace and extent work was done on the German side and on the Russian side in the preceding year for the increase of the army. The ratio was increasingly shifting to the disadvantage of the German army, which thus had to bear a continually greater combat burden. This situation appeared quite clearly in the interview at Orel.

62. *Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic*

This situation was not changed either by the fact that Göring began in 1942 to organize 22 "Luftwaffe Field Divisions", which in general had the same organization as the infantry Divisions. They were employed as these in the framework of the army. The personnel was drawn from the excessively numerous availabilities accumulated by the Luftwaffe. Instead of handing over these men, about 400,000 of them, to the army, which on the basis of its great war experience would have organized them into well-instructed operational units led by combat-proven officers and thus would have received a considerable increase of forces, the "Luftwaffe Field Divisions" remained a constituent part of the Luftwaffe, organized by it, without being able to be even moderately instructed for fighting.

At that time Himmler also worked with special zeal on the increase of his police units and on the creation of new "Waffen-SS" Divisions. In the course of the war I had most of the large groupings of the "Waffen-SS" under my command. They performed very well in the fighting. The Waffen-SS were exclusively combat units. After the war an injustice was done to them by mixing them up and confusing them with the other SS organizations destined for different missions.

The creation of Waffen-SS Divisions and Luftwaffe Field Divisions violated the absolute and indisputable principle of the organization of forces with unity of conception, which for ground fighting could only be found in the army and before which all other considerations had to take second place. In the autumn of 1942 there was no clear enough idea at the front how little recourse was had to feasible effective measures to increase the military power of the Reich. In March 1943 it became known that Hitler at that time had ordered the so-called "800,000-man plan", on the basis of which personnel were to be taken out of administration, economic activities and communications and sent to the front. The resistance of those whose interests were at stake was too great, as it later became clear, for these measures to be successful.

The Headquarters of the XXXV Army Corps was located about 20 kilometers south of Orel, at some distance from the road that leads from this city to Kursk; it passes through a rich and fertile area of crops, for here begins the region of the "black earth" that extends far into Southern Russia. A country road led from the highway to a group of brick houses which, according to the map, had the name Krasnaja Swesda, meaning "Red Star". Here was formerly the seat of the administration of a large Koljoz. From here we continued along a gentle slope covered with well-cultivated apple trees (the only ones I saw in Central Russia) to a small deep valley, the slopes of which were covered with oak trees and at the bottom of which ran a small stream about a meter wide. On the slopes on both sides there was in the middle of the wooded belt a relatively large number of buildings built of thick oak logs and covered with thick thatched roofs; each of them had several rooms. The Army Corps Command was housed in these tasteful and even artistic accommodations, which were still being finished. Here it could be seen how the lack of taste and often the "banality" in military constructions, for lodgings, could be avoided with plan and dispositions as well as with the adaptation to the surroundings already required by the passive anti-aircraft defense, without this demanding a more numerous personnel or a greater quantity of materials.

In the "Red Star" I was to have my quarters for almost eight months; it was the longest period I spent in any one area during the war.

My first concern was naturally to learn the situation of the corps in all the necessary details. It was on the right wing of the 2nd Armored Army and extended in the form of a half arc east of Orel, which was about 50 kilometers behind the front. The Corps consisted at that time, mentioned from left to right, of the 4th Armored Division, which did not yet have tanks, the 56th Infantry Division and the 262nd Infantry Division. The long rest period meant that the Divisions had their combat strength almost complete. The Infantry regiments already then had only two battalions, while this was already the case with the armored grenadier regiments from the very beginning. Both the 4th Armored Division and the 262nd Infantry Division had to defend a 30-kilometer-wide belt each, and the 56th Infantry Division a 40-kilometer-wide belt. The widths of the belts were determined by the probable directions of attack, which could be assumed to be one from Mzensk on Orel (4th Armored Division) and the other from the Novosil area on Orel (262nd Infantry Division).

The positions were well constructed, had one or even two zones of barbed wire and in numerous parts also

minefields. In front of the front of the left division ran the Oka River, quite meandering and deeply embanked, being a respectable obstacle; in front of a part of the central division ran the Sussha, which flows into the Oka, also deeply embanked, although fordable in many parts. In front of a part of the right division ran the Nerutsch, which has analogous characteristics to those of the Sussha, into which it flows. In the left Division's belt was the small town of Mzensk at a short distance from the front. Through it passes the great road linking Orel with Tula.

Each division had a battalion as a reserve. The Corps as well as the Army (2nd Armored) had no other forces at its disposal. Since I assumed that in the event of an enemy attack the entire corps front would not be attacked, I proceeded with the formation of "potential" reserves by ordering each division to prepare the "reserve" of a battalion and a light artillery group, so that by midnight of the day the order was given at the latest, they would be at the disposal of the corps command. The enlistment of mechanized traction vehicles was also to be prepared at that time for the transport of the battalion. This brought a certain security to the Command and in the coming spring was to prove its great usefulness in eliminating a major irruption as well as in having to support neighbors on both sides. I often found that when means are scarce, seemingly insignificant preventive measures can be of great value.

It took me quite a long time to get to know the commanders, the units, the positions as well as the supply facilities. This activity did not cease during the whole time of my command, although with less intensity after the first weeks. A front 100 kilometers wide and about 50 kilometers deep, where 40,000 soldiers are engaged, is almost impossible to know completely, even if I could not take care of many details that interested me when I was a Division commander. Nor is a front something rigid, for it is subject in many respects to change and improvement. Positions are continually improved; road, telephone, wireless communications, as well as billets and sanitary facilities are enlarged and improved; the different seasons of the year require special arrangements such as, for instance, for the approaching winter the raising of barbed wire and mines; the enemy's measures force countermeasures; often undertakings of one's own are undertaken with the object of disturbing the adversary's work and of capturing prisoners to obtain reports. As regards personnel, too, there are frequent changes. The work of training continues to be carried out in a demanding manner; officers and non-commissioned officers were alternately brought together for courses. The life in the positions was very tiring for the units, but they had to fulfill all these tasks together with their main one, the guard, observation and enlistment service. Especially the extraordinarily extensive front meant for them a very great nourishment of the efforts.

As far as sanitation was concerned, the fight against parasites, especially lice, continued unabated. The delousing facilities were increasingly decentralized. The plague of rats was a major concern. These mammals came in large numbers from the fields to the positions and gnawed everything, clothing, footwear and belts. They were also carriers of tularemia, the so-called gnawing disease, which occurred after eating food gnawed by rats and caused great physical weakness for several weeks. The wooden crates in which the bread was kept were gnawed in one night. As there was not enough tin for containers, the bread was placed on boards suspended from wires hung from the roof of the forts.

As the situation in this sector of the front had long since stabilized, facilities were also set up for the distraction of unit personnel. Numerous radio receivers were located in the positions; in some cases there were film shows; books, magazines and newspapers were circulated. One difficulty was lighting. The lack of candles and oil could not be remedied. It is true that finally a million carbide lamps were manufactured for the eastern front; but it was omitted to manufacture at the same time a tenfold quantity of spare wicks, so that these lamps, after one or two months could no longer be used. Thus, on my visits to the front I could give the garrison of a fort the same joy with a few candles as with cigarettes or a bottle of brandy. Naturally, my resources were very small compared to the magnitude of the needs.

The timely arrival of winter clothing was a source of satisfaction. Warm underwear, lined blouses and pants, fur vests and caps, heavy sheepskin coats for drivers and sentries, and felt footwear were provided in adequate quantities. Cold-resistant lubricants and oils for weapons and vehicles also arrived. In addition to my satisfaction with these provisions against the cold, there was the painful memory of the previous winter.

64. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

The district in which the Corps was located was extremely fertile. This was the beginning of the "black earth" region, which extends over an enormous area southward through the Ukraine. Apart from a few small mountains, we had no forests. This plain with its wide horizons, which was known to continue far beyond with analogous plains of analogous extent, aroused the impression of infinity. A powerful force resided in it, as well as an endless melancholy that seemed to cast a heavy shadow over that force. It must have been such a landscape that shaped Puschkin's soul. In our area there were also numerous villages. A considerable part of the population had remained; only most of the men of military age were missing. Despite the wealth of the area, the life of the people did not differ much from that in less fertile areas. The higher yield of the soil only benefited the state. By fixing the amounts to be delivered by the various Kolkhoz, a certain uniformity of the standard of living was achieved in all regions of Russia.

In many houses the inhabitants again had placed icons, which were kept hidden at the arrival of the German troops. In the city of Orel and its surroundings, in a large radius, lives a human type of astonishing beauty that does not show even the slightest Mongolian features. I could never know clearly whether at the time of Mongol rule that region was not occupied or was occupied only to a very small extent. The spiritual state of the population differed somewhat from that which I had hitherto encountered. Everywhere an orientation of mild criticism against the Soviet regime manifested itself, which could probably be explained by the long duration of the German occupation and the suspension of Soviet political propaganda.

The people were friendly and open. In them especially I observed the characteristic of many Russians that when they converse they do not direct their gaze to the person they are talking to, but divert it to the distance. It was not that these men wanted to look away; it seemed instead that their souls were always searching for something.

In January 1943 we had to carry out an interesting operational deception maneuver. Behind the enemy front, in the Tula area, was the Russian 3rd Armored Army, which according to the latest news had 800 tanks. The Russian Supreme Command was constantly worried that the Germans would attack in the Orel area, so it left that army in that area, although the fighting in Stalingrad was then being fought in full intensity.

When the German Supreme Command considered that the time had come when the Russians would use this army in the fighting in the south, it was decided to implement deception measures that would at least delay their movement. For this purpose, the progressive arrival of important armored forces was simulated by means of a well harmonized and tuned radiotelegraphic set in the rear area of the German 2nd Armored Army, which was gradually extended to the jurisdiction of my Corps. In addition, all the measures that should corroborate, in the desired sense, the radiotelegraphic picture were adopted, such as the increase of rail and road traffic (which was achieved by the concentration in one week of the supply transports, which normally required several weeks), the occupation of localities with new units, the reconnaissance by staffs of armored groups, the appearance of groups with the black uniform of the armored troop units in a way that did not attract attention, the dissemination of news among the population, the signs of a certain nervousness in the front due to an increased unmotivated fire activity, the occasional aerial interceptions by fighter planes, etc.

A few days after the initiation of these measures the enemy radiotelegraph service indicated that the Armored Army had begun the march southward; but after two days, it interrupted the movement and returned to its previous quarters. It was not until four or five days after his return that the deception seems to have been discovered and the army then marched definitively. His departure had been delayed by about ten days.

Winter had come unexpectedly with heavy frosts; shortly thereafter we had heavy snowfalls; however, not as much snow fell until January as in the previous year. At the beginning of January the 34th Infantry Division moved into the Corps and took over the area from the 4th Armored Division. The 4th Armored Division was equipped with new tanks and moved south.

The events connected with the siege and the fall of Stalingrad, which had their initial focus many hundreds of kilometers to the south of us, also made themselves felt soon. Following the 6th Army in the Stalingrad area, there was a Romanian, an Italian and a Hungarian army on the Don. The combat value of these forces was only small. While the 6th Army was still holding out in Stalingrad, the foreign armies following to the north were

soon pushed back and were practically wiped out completely. An enormous clearing of 300 kilometers was opened, for the closing of which almost no forces were available; this lack of forces had contributed precisely to the long stalemate of the fight in the Stalingrad area. To the north, following this clearing, was the German 2nd Army with its right wing on the Don, in the approximate area of Woronesch, and with its left wing supported by my Corps, belonging to the 2nd Armored Army.

The Russians intended to push the front more and more to the north and at the end of January 1943 they engaged against the German 2nd Army far superior forces that had been left free in the south. Although they succeeded in pushing back this army whose flank was open and did not have to be pushed back, the Russians were not able to do so.

I had reserves at my disposal, but they did not manage to break it. In this critical situation, at the beginning of February 1943, the 229th Infantry Division, which was immediately south of my Corps, was subordinated to me. The Division had just suffered two breakthroughs of some magnitude and had just pledged its last small reserve. Further attacks were imminent.

The Corps directed southward the small reserves that had been foreseen, employing railroads and trucks; that of the right division by foot marches. This movement was considerably hindered and greatly retarded by sudden snowfalls of an intensity almost unknown until then and especially by violent snowstorms which in a very short time covered all the roads. In several places the snow accumulated by the gusts of wind was so thick that the mouths of an 8.8 cm. anti-aircraft battery which were more than three meters above the ground, after three hours only emerged very little from the snow. These circumstances made it equally difficult for the enemy to move, so that only small combat actions were achieved, but they made extreme demands on the physical forces of the units. In spite of the powerful obstruction of the snowfalls and storms, it was also possible to engage the reserves so opportunely that the front was definitively established and the enemy attacks were stopped and gradually decreased. These were again extraordinary tests of the units' capabilities. The 299th Infantry Division, which had just passed into the Corps, in these fights would have lost ground to a depth of 10 kilometers. This resulted in the 262nd Infantry Division, located on the right wing of the Corps, having to be withdrawn behind the Nerutsch. The girdle of the 299th Infantry Division was 40 kilometers wide, so that the corps front now reached, with its four divisions, 140 kilometers.

The last tactical action shows again that no two battles are alike. Each one presents different forms and different problems. The terrain, the season, the state of the weather, the characteristics of the enemy's driving and forces, one's own strength and its relation to that of the adversary, as well as other circumstances, are never the same in combat. That is why there are no recipes for leadership either. Weak people try to establish such recipes and thus arrive at the scheme, the greatest enemy of success.

The special problems and new situations that each combat brings with it can only be mastered by means of always different methods, keeping one's own intention firm and, whenever possible, the initiative. Even when circumstances are never the same, the experience acquired in previous combats is of incalculable importance; it provides a high degree of security to the criterion and to the resolution. This is particularly true when proceeding in difficult situations. If one has gone through such situations once or several times or frequently and if one has drawn from them other lessons than the knowledge of their action on one's own person and on the units, then also the new difficult situations lose much of their dangerousness, for they can no longer easily influence the rightness of one's thinking or weaken the energy of one's resolution. Analogous is what happens with the surprise and with many other phenomena that the struggle brings with it. It is true that experience also has a technical aspect; but, in its essence, it is a problem of a psychological order and, for this reason, its transmission to others can only be always incomplete.

While the winter struggles were being waged, news reached the front of the demand made by the conference of our adversaries in Casablanca for the "unconditional surrender". Only a few did not take this demand seriously. In the great majority of the soldiers it produced the utmost anger. Each knew or suspected what such

66. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

a surrender meant. Even the most ingenious and astute propaganda of its own would not have succeeded in increasing the will of the German soldiers to fight so much.

as this demand of the adversaries.

The quiet of the positional warfare was interrupted in the first half of March by an undertaking of some size by the Russians against the 262nd Infantry Division, the center-right Division of the Corps. That excellent Division spread over a 30-kilometer front, recruited with Austrian personnel, was attacked on a very narrow front by a Russian Division which employed its regiments one behind the other and was supported by a tank brigade numbering 56 KV-1 heavy tanks. The Russians managed to break through and penetrated, retaining their narrow front, at a depth of about 2 kilometers. Here they were placed in front of the Division's reserve battalion. It was evident that with its own forces the Division could not re-establish the situation, since the mass of its forces was tied up in the very extensive front. For this reason, the reserves to be held ready for the Corps by the other three Divisions as well as two heavy antitank companies were directed to the 262nd Division.

The snow had diminished considerably, the track of the roads was still firmly frozen and, for some time, free of snow. Rail traffic was disturbed to a small extent by night bombers attacking the Orel station. However, 48 hours elapsed before all forces were assembled in the planned area. During that time the Russians tried to widen their zone of irruption, both laterally by rolling up positions and also in depth. In a tenacious unequal fight, the brave garrisons managed to maintain their trenches completely; in depth, the Russians, who employed their third regiment here, managed to gain an extra kilometer of ground. On the morning of the third day after the breakthrough, the three reserve battalions, supported by 15 batteries, moved to the flank counterattack and after a fight of several hours threw the Russians beyond the position. Some 200 prisoners were taken and nine tanks were destroyed.

I was never clear about the purpose of the Russian enterprise. If the Russian command had, at the same time, simulated attack preparations in other parts of the Corps front or threatened attacks, it would hardly have been possible to draw off the reserves and displace them and the enterprise might have brought the Corps into a dangerous crisis.

12. Russia

The Russian soldier and his driving.

Imminence of an enemy offensive with center of gravity in the XXXV Army Corps. Army Corps.

In the many combats in which I had so far taken part in Russia, in attack and defense, in offensive and retreats, I continually tried to deepen my knowledge of the characteristics of the Russian soldier and his leadership.

The study of the history of war and our own experience led us to the general conclusion that the leadership, in its resolutions and objectives, is strongly influenced by the organization and instruction of its units, but, more than anything else, by their combat value. This value, in turn, is essentially conditioned by the national qualities of the people from which these units come.

The combat value also varies greatly when an ideology dominates the combatants. The audacity of Napoleon's strategy and way of fighting is due in part to the sufficient organization and instruction of the first armies he led as well as to the revolutionary ideology that animated them. That ideology, together with the traditional military qualities of the French people, made those armies an excellent instrument of attack. The characteristics of the people, from whom they come, also gravitate in the chiefs. For this reason, reflections on the Russian leadership and its soldiers must be preceded by considerations on the Russian people.

The numerous peoples of Russia, the whole of which we shall call "the Russian people", are Slavs, if one disregards the marginal regions. The incorporation of foreign blood carried out through the centuries in the course of its history, has not worked uniformly in all parts of Russia. Of special scope is the mixture of Mughal blood that took place during the 300 years of the Tatar rule. It had an essential influence on the Russian character. It is most aptly characterized by Maxim Gorky, in his book "Reminiscences of Tolstoy, Tschekow and Andrew". when he says about Tolstoy:

"He was a national poet in the most complete and exact sense of the word. He carried in his great soul all the deficiencies of his people, all the mutilations we have suffered in our history. His nebulous preaching about "Do nothing", "Do not resist evil" and his "Doctrine of passivity", all this is the insane fermenting material of the old Russian blood poisoned with Mughal fatalism. By its chemical composition it is strange and hostile to the West with active and inextinguishable resistance to the pernicious in life".

That Mughal tendency to passivity may have come to exert an influence determined by having found a similar, if much weaker, tendency in the primitive blood of the peoples of Russia.

Other historical events have also influenced the Russian character. Thus, vast regions of its vast territory, which are not protected by natural borders, have always been re-occupied by foreign conquerors in the course of centuries, who often ruled in a cruel and tyrannical manner. Thus, for example, Kiev has hosted within its walls about a hundred times foreign armies. The decisive traits of mistrust and prudence thus became more and more evident, just as the Slavic capacity for suffering and patience in pain became even more pronounced. Thus, in the mass of the Russian people, extreme patience and the utmost capacity for suffering, a certain

passivity and submission in the face of life and destiny, little initiative and in many (which, by the way, also occurs in other peoples) an easy inclination to awaken to cruelty and harshness, which is where their Mughal heritage appears most manifestly.

To the innate elements, due to blood, which influence the spiritual and sentimental nature of the people and individual behavior, are added as external factors education and propaganda. This education has been governed for a generation exclusively by the principles and objectives of communism and has achieved surprising results in the inculcation of the ideals of communism in the greater part of the population, especially in the younger generations. The doctrine of the greatness of Russia, of the world domination of communism and of Russia's

mission to liberate other peoples, already emphasized by the old Muscovite ideology, has been fully accepted by a large part of these people. This I have been able to verify, at every moment, in my conversations with numerous Russians.

Communist education seeks to develop enthusiasm, initiative and energy, which are the most important bases for achieving good performance not only in actions of peace but also and especially in actions of war. And here it must be established that this objective has only been achieved to a very limited extent, since it is contrary to various fundamental traits that determine the national character, which precisely cannot be modified by education. Those traits that hinder educational action are precisely the factors that make the people easy to lead, that make them bear all the sacrifices that are demanded of them, and that can lead them to carry out great collective actions in certain fields when they are led by a few who possess initiative and energy. But when the initiative and energy of the leaders alone are not enough to achieve the desired goal, but the same qualities must be demanded of the sub-leaders and, in the last analysis, also to a certain extent of each one, then failure results.

National qualities characterize the mass of a people. It is evident that they do not appear with equal intensity in each of the inhabitants. This is partly due to the diversity of the blood currents in a people and the way they manifest themselves in each of the inhabitants. Another cause is to be found in the conformity that individual life imprints on the character of each one. From these causes, from the national characteristics of a people we can form a judgment on how the mass thinks and acts, although not without more a determined individual.

These findings on important features of the nature of the Russian people also explain and confirm many observations that we had made about the Russian soldier in combat. In the army of our time, the weapons in which the national character is most reflected are infantry, armored troops and combat airmen. Infantry and tanks fight in such conditions, that the fire considerably reduces the possibility for the immediate commander to make his influence felt on individual men and almost completely rules out his personal influence. Combat, for this reason, requires initiative and energy from every man in these units within their narrow, albeit limited, radius of action. The same applies to the combat aviator who personally always acts in isolation.

The fundamentally passive idiosyncrasy of the Russians makes the soldier neither an attacker nor an individual fighter. In the many combats that I had to lead in Russia, there was none in which the Russian infantry had shown a superior offensive spirit and acted with initiative. In the attack, also in the war of movement, the Russian achieved a success only when he was several times superior in forces. When he had conquered a success, as a rule he did not exploit it immediately, but allowed time to pass, which benefited the defender. The cause of this fact must also be sought mainly in the infantry, which was almost always content with initial successes until the impulse came from behind. And this impulse very often did not come.

Here it must be said that the Russian artillery performed very well in terms of firing technique and artillery tactics. The Russian supreme leadership soon recognized the poor offensive power of its infantry and tried to compensate for it by a strong increase in artillery and grenade launcher units. With these measures he did not change the infantry but he certainly made their task easier and thus increased the prospects of success. Often German units with strong cohesion and abundant ammunition have successfully repulsed Russian attackers with a fourfold or even greater superiority. When in later times, when taking over a front, I found a force ratio with the Russians of 1 to 5, if sufficient ammunition was available, I felt passably safe. The reduced offensive power of the infantry, the root of which must be sought mainly in the national character, was still further diminished by the fact that it, to the benefit of the other arms, was neglected as regards the personnel assigned to it. We were able to establish this by comparing the prisoners of the different arms and their statements. The best personnel, especially in officers, we found in the artillery which, it seems, was considered by the Russians as the backbone of the army. Next came the airmen and then, surprisingly, not always, the tank crews. Already during the war, we had the categorical experience that in the last analysis, it is the infantry and tanks that have the decisive tasks and that in terms of the quality of their personnel they cannot be in inferiority compared to the other weapons. The Russians evidently did not have enough appropriate personnel for all the weapons.

That the Russian is not an individual fighter was also shown in aviation, despite the fact that in this weapon

selected personnel were employed. The Russian fighter aviator did not succeed in confronting the German fighter, even though the latter was clearly outnumbered.

During the war we had gathered the impression that the Russian supreme leadership was very good; but we also soon recognized that the leadership was inferior and (apart from a few exceptions) evidenced in its field of action the same qualities that characterized the mass of the army. In attack it lacked initiative to take advantage of favorable situations as well as rapid adaptability in the further development of tactical ideas. The scheme and the systematization were frequently represented in his measures, as it will have already been possible to deduce also from the reported combats, even though these accounts have not gone into details. For the rest I will return to the Russian leadership on later occasions.

The great strength of the Russians lies in the defense. In it the preponderant role of the infantry in the fight is manifested in a special way. The activity of the artillery in the defense presents only few differences from the psychological point of view with those which it develops in the attack, the tanks also in the defense act practically only by means of the attack and the aviators can only fulfill their task by means of the attack; on the other hand, the fight of the infantry in the defense is also, from the psychological point of view, fundamentally different from its fight in the attack. And this difference is of the utmost importance in appreciating the potency of the Russian defense.

In defense it is not required of the soldier that he always take again the resolution to advance, to seek continually new cover, even if precarious, to employ his weapon in situations that vary constantly and to take advantage, with conscious purpose, of the action of the other weapons. Even when such activities are fixed in a general way by orders, they require in attack always again a certain measure of individual initiative, precisely because not every detail can be ordered. All this disappears in defense; even the handling of the weapon is simplified. Defense, on the other hand, makes maximum demands on the power of endurance and stamina as well as tenacity. The capacity for suffering, submission and passive will lead the Russian soldier in defense to withstand even the most intense fire. His energy is transformed into the passive tenacity with which he maintains his position and activity in the handling of the

The weapon is awakened by the imposition of the adversary in whom the initiative in the action is found. Also the subordinate chiefs can make their action felt much more in the defense than in the attack.

The defense was further facilitated by the extraordinary great skill in earthworks and in the rapid construction of positions that the Russians possess. In a very short time they have established positions and also built covers in areas where they were not imperatively necessary, or even more so were superfluous. We often saw in this how attached the Russians were to the land and how determined they were to hold it firmly. Our soldiers also built excellent positions; but, as a rule, they did not do it with pleasure and not responding to an internal impulse as the Russians did.

It cannot be left unmentioned that one could also cite numerous examples of high fighting spirit, strong offensive drive and initiative; but it was not the rule and perhaps they are related, in some way, to the aforementioned exceptions to the qualities that characterize the mass.

After the attempted breakthrough by the Russians in March 1943, it was not until the summer that fighting of any magnitude broke out here. At that time, the enemy adopted a measure which was something of a puzzle to us and whose purpose we did not succeed in discovering for a long time. We received several times the news provided by prisoners which was confirmed in other sectors of the army front, that the Russians were withdrawing the civilian population in a zone 50 kilometers deep behind their front. The cause of this measure can only be attributed to an increase in the secrecy of projected operations. In view of the magnitude of the evacuations, such large-scale planned operations had to be considered.

In the middle of June, Marshal von Kluge, Commander-in-Chief of Army Group "Center", visited the Corps. I explained to him the situation of the Corps in all its details and accompanied him in the inspection of the positions of two Divisions. He was visibly impressed by the great extensions of the positions they occupied, by

70. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

the sparseness of their occupation and by the lack of reserves which he was not in a position to remedy. I had great personal esteem for Marshal von Kluge. During the whole time of my action in Russia I was under his command, at first when I commanded the 4th Army and later when I commanded the Army Group "Center". I learned to know him as a driver of great vision and energy, who never asked for something impossible and was open to suggestions. As a Division commander I succeeded on two occasions in getting him to suspend the execution of attacks in which it was planned to employ my Division as a reserve of that Army and whose expected result was in no relation to the losses that could be foreseen.

In the last third of June an offensive action of a certain magnitude was undertaken on the German side immediately south of us, which was aimed at the elimination of a wide and deep front line, which had been obtained by the Russians in the area north of Kursk to the south of Charkow in the Winter Battle. The attack was carried out with two strong offensive groupings, of which the southern one was to attack through Belgorod and the northern one (9th Army) from the southern zone of the 2nd Armored Army (and with it also of my Corps) on Kursk. From this operation it can again be recognized that in the year 1943 also nothing had been done for a noteworthy reinforcement of the army which would have enabled it for an offensive in great style and that the Russians, on the other hand, had advanced incomparably more in the organization of their army. The attack collided everywhere against a strong enemy superiority and except for some irruptions of some depth only achieved local successes. But then the Russians launched an offensive of major proportions against the 2nd Armored Army. Its center of gravity was directed against my XXXV Army Corps.

While the fighting in the Belgorod-Kursk area was still in full swing we could observe a progressive build-up of forces in front of the corps center, consisting of large infantry and tank groups. For this purpose the Russians used especially the railroads leading through Jelez in the direction of Orel and partly also through Livny. From the beginning of July increasingly heavy traffic was observed on these lines. Aerial photographs showed many trains loaded with tanks. Aerial scouting also determined a variable occupation of the localities north and south of Novosil and shortly thereafter also a large number of positions prepared for batteries. The observation airmen frequently succeeded in the early morning hours in catching the last part of the movements of the groupings marching at night. Gradually an increasing number of batteries opened fire in the area east of Novosil. This was the space in front of the left wing of the 262nd Austrian Division; the center of gravity was evidently directed against the regiment of the left wing of that Division; the sector of that regiment had the great extension of 10 kilometers.

The means employed by the enemy were too great for these measures to be aimed only at deception, which was easy to suppose, however, since to our south the German offensive actions against Kursk and Belgorod were in progress.

The final result of aerial scouting, radiotelegraphic listening, reports from liaison men and statements from enemy deserters was that in a large area around Novosil there were concentrated at least twelve rifle divisions, the 3rd Armored Army and some large independent armored groupings. The 3rd Armored Army was supposed to consist of at least three Armored Corps, each of which had 256 heavy tanks. In addition, the positions in front of the corps were occupied by 6 rifle divisions.

It must be stated here that the Russians did not succeed in keeping their concentration secret, nor did they succeed in keeping secret the direction in which they would make the attack, although we were not able to determine all their forces even before the battle, a fault which was revealed later on in a progressive manner. These forces were in reality more than half as large as we had assumed on July 10. The performance of our scouting service must likewise be regarded as truly excellent. I could learn to appreciate here especially the value of wireless listening units and an experienced information service (IC).

The observation airmen rendered outstanding services in the period of the Russian attack preparations, as well as especially in the later tactical actions.

On July 10 it was clear that an attack of extraordinary power was imminent from the Novosil area. In the vicinity of Mzensk there was not the slightest indication of an offensive intention. Instead, intensive attack

preparations were also being made in the neighboring Corps on the left in the Bolchoff area.

We noticed in a sensitive way the lack of any support by the Luftwaffe, without the aerial exploration. This lack should have given rise to all the more concern since it had been clearly recognized that fights of great violence were being prepared on the front of the 2nd Armored Army. The most valuable cooperation that the air weapon can lend to the defense is to destroy or at least to beat the enemy's preparation. In the present case there were, by the way, extremely favorable targets. This was not done; neither did it later cooperate in battle. Also the Russians only in a few cases employed small groups of battle planes.

At that time, the first line of our position was a trench with a depth of 1.50 to 2 meters with steps for the shooters. At about 200 meters, and up to 300 meters as well, behind the first line was a second, though not entirely continuous, line, and behind it a very scattered set in depth of footholds for machine guns, grenade launchers

and anti-tank guns; part of these support points had wire fences. In front of the positions there was a continuous barbed wire fence at least 3 meters wide and in many areas up to 6 meters. In front of this obstacle and on it were placed plate mines and in front of a great part of the position also anti-tank mines.

A reinforcement of the position was given by the watercourses on whose banks it was established. The Oka, in front of the 34th Division was a complete obstacle, largely with steep tank-proof banks. The Susha and the Nerutsch in front of the 56th and 262nd Divisions, respectively, were in many parts fordable, though not by tanks, while the Oserka in front of the 299th Division was of only small value as an obstacle. The battery positions had been perfected into resistance nests with trenches and barbed wire; several mines and antitank batteries had also been placed in this obstacle. The mass of the batteries had prepared fire for antitank defense with direct fire from 600 to 1,000 meters distance.

The available troops did not allow an occupation of the position in all its parts. Only the first line was occupied in the form of a center of gravity, although in a very sparse form, while the heavy weapons were in the most important points of support arranged in depth.

The occupation was thus extremely precarious and without the formation of a well manifested center of gravity it would not have been able to resist, perhaps not even temporarily, a strong attack. The Corps was left to itself and within the framework of its reduced forces it had to do everything possible to oppose the Russian attack with the maximum forces that could be allocated. These could only be obtained from the other Divisions, which already without it had exaggeratedly wide belts, which meant an extraordinarily great risk. As it became increasingly clear that the center of gravity of the Russian attack was directed against the 262nd Division's left wing regiment, the 482nd Infantry Regiment and its 10-kilometer wide sector, one battalion and one artillery group each from the 34th and 299th Divisions were brought into the area around Archangelskoje, behind the 262nd Division's left wing, where the latter also had its reserve; both artillery groups went into position there. A battalion and an artillery group of the 56th Division, neighboring on the left, was rushed behind its right wing. While the two neighboring divisions were left with the heavy antitank defense, I resolved after an intense spiritual struggle that the 34th Division, which was to hold the important Mzensk sector, should also have its heavy antitank company withdrawn and taken on the night of 10-11 July to the 262nd Division.

Thus, in the sector of the center of gravity that was foreseen, of a width of 10 kilometers, there were 6 battalions, 12 batteries and 24 heavy antitank, while in the remaining 130 kilometers of the front of the Corps there remained only 18 battalions, 24 batteries and 26 heavy antitank guns (of which 12 were fixedly installed). Thus, in a sector that represented 1/14, or 7%, of the front of the Corps, 25% of infantry, 43% of artillery and 48% of heavy anti-tank defense. Such a formation meant an extraordinarily great risk and constituted the extreme limit of the responsibility that one could still assume. The occupation outside the center of gravity sector which, according to the above, was almost the entire front of the Corps (93%), was thus hardly more than a thin veil of security.

I still remember precisely the feelings that dominated me and the struggle of intense nervous tension that I

72. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

waged when I made the resolution to form that center of gravity. I have often felt that the adoption of a resolution becomes extremely difficult when one responsibility struggles against another responsibility. But I have never experienced it so incisively and sharply as in this case. With the same immutable clarity, the feelings and reflections that animated me at the time as I saw the

Russian attack with forces vastly superior to what the Corps had to oppose.

Notwithstanding the numerical superiority of the enemy, I was well aware that for the time being, I could not expect support from any side. At that time it was also probable that the Army Group Command could not foresee whether or not it would be possible to draw forces in a timely manner from the fighting north of Kursk, which had not yet ended. In any case, I received about such a possibility neither a promise nor a confirmation. A discouragement or hesitation in this situation would have been unfailingly fatal. And it is a peculiarity of dangerous and even desperate situations that on the one hand they can create discouragement and on the other hand mobilize all intellectual and spiritual forces and increase energy to the point of stubbornness and stubbornness.

While the adversary, who had abundant means at his disposal, continually brought in new forces and on our maps of the enemy's situation more and more Divisions and armored groupings appeared in an untiring activity, we thought and executed all the countermeasures in the conviction that the form of these dispositions and the ideas that served as a basis, as well as the high combat value of the units, could compensate in part for the enemy's numerical superiority. However, he knew very well that in the face of the masses there is a limit to the effectiveness of the spirit, will and intelligence possessed by the commandos and the troop units.

At that time I talked in the trenches with many commanders and with many soldiers. They all knew some aspect of Russian preparations and in all I found firm confidence. I knew from experience that nothing can so weaken and paralyze force as surprise. For this reason I had ordered that all the soldiers be told that the impending attack would be very powerful and that there must be heavy artillery fire and many tanks. Again it was pointed out to the infantry that they should let through the tanks and proceed immediately to close the front again.

In the days preceding the attack new enemy batteries were continually located in firing activity. The fire of the own batteries that had entered position in that area was withheld. For the batteries held in reserve a large number of favorable positions had been prepared, which were measured trigonometrically. The reserve battalions were well masked; the battalion and company commanders were well oriented as to the particular conditions of the position and had scouted the possible directions of employment of their respective units. An intense tension reigned over the whole front, caused by the expectation of new combats, the magnitude of which no one could yet specify, but which everyone suspected.

13. Russia

The great defensive battle for Orel.

On July 12 the battle began. From early morning the fire of 120 to 150 batteries was directed against the 10-kilometer wide regimental sector of the 262nd Division, which it was appreciated would be the girdle of the enemy center of gravity, and extended only a little further south of it. The enemy batteries were so numerous and so densely emplaced in front as well as in depth that a precise determination of their numbers was not possible. But it was as if with the sudden initiation of the attack an evil spell had been broken.

All the headaches and long thoughts about possibilities suddenly disappeared. We were now faced with a harsh reality, with a new task that contained many unknowns and required all our skills.

At about 06:00 the Russian infantry went on the attack. As we learned later, the Russians employed five Divisions against the regimental sector. They adopted dense formations that were highly articulated in depth. Our artillery managed to perform a devastating action. The six retained batteries were immediately employed as it was recognized that the Russian center of gravity had been rightly recognized, for up to the commencement of the artillery fire it was only a presumption. The fight was being fought for the front line. The 482nd Regiment, composed mostly of Austrians, fought heroically against a superiority 15 to 20 times greater. The enemy's irruptions were always followed by new counter-shocks and with the employment of my reserve battalion of the Division it was possible to sustain this unequal combat for six hours. It was possible to form a new front some 200 to 300 meters to the rear, taking advantage of the finished trench parts of the second line and a number of support points. The fact that this was possible must be regarded as a proof of the special ability of the regiment.

A participation of Russian tanks in the first period of the fighting was ruled out since they needed bridges for the passage of the Susha. Already during the fighting the Russians started the construction of several bridges and, in spite of our artillery fire in the form of shortcut fire on the river, which was not visible, they managed to complete them by noon. Here, too, the lack of cooperation of our aviation made itself felt very much.

In the afternoon the Russians launched into combat about 150 heavy tanks. The Russian infantry seemed to have waited for them as after the occupation of our front line they had not continued the attack. The tanks passed over most of our infantry positions and came under heavy anti-tank defense and artillery fire. A part of the tanks took part in the fight against our forward line, which was now also attacked by enemy infantry. Our infantry was quite isolated during this combat since the adversary was too close to it in our previous front line, which did not allow us to beat him with our artillery. Only his reserves, which always approached in dense formations, were beaten with good efficiency.

The uneven fighting for the second line continued to fluctuate throughout the afternoon. The reserve battalion delivered by the 34th Division, Rhineland, was engaged and in an unparalleled fight managed to hold the position again and again. The number of German battalions fighting here was less than that of the attacking divisions, waves of tanks were added to those which were mostly in the back of our infantry.

The tanks had the mission, as we learned from the statements of the prisoners in the evening, to eliminate the heavy anti-tank defense in the depth of our position as a precondition for the further employment of armored groupings. A number of tanks were put out of action already before reaching the positions. The tanks managed to put out of action two or three heavy anti-tank guns and some machine gun and grenade launcher nests. A group of several tanks wanted to flatten the batteries further forward; two were destroyed by mines laid in the barbed wire so others changed course. Tanks never again tried to flatten wire battery positions. In general, the enemy tanks advanced very hesitantly. About 60 of them were left down on the battlefield. The mass, after

74. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

some time, retreated back to behind their infantry. In the meantime the Russians had made breakthroughs in some places in the most forward line from which they could no longer be dislodged. I could not resolve to touch the two reserve battalions still available. In front of the lost parts of the population, only a few isolated footholds were formed.

It was a day of fierce fighting in which units and commanders of all ranks performed real feats. The most difficult task fell, as always, to the infantry. Their tenacious courage was reflected not only in the hard and fierce fight for their position, especially after the tanks had passed over it, but mainly in the defense of the position, without having withdrawn from the battlefield, immediately after it had been lost. Wherever I was in command, I always attached the greatest importance precisely to this procedure, in the training of the infantry for the defense. Since in the whirlwind of fighting and through losses, especially of commanders, the cohesion of the units is often temporarily lost, the spiritual education that small groups should cling tenaciously to the ground even in the absence of any link or communication is also part of this instruction. This procedure, as it is demonstrated by experience, almost always diminishes the losses and facilitates in an extraordinary way the formation of a new front even when with clearings. When weak troops are available, this is the most effective means to prevent a catastrophic break of the front in the defense. When abundant reserves are available, all this, naturally, is much simpler.

The day had to be considered a great success, even if the enemy numerical superiority had not been so disparate and almost gross. Nevertheless, the concern for the following day was distressing. The high losses suffered by the enemy did not weigh heavily on him, given the troops he had. The losses of the infantry itself were also considerable. They could be compensated by the employment of two reserve battalions but, because of this employment, half of the reserves had been consumed. Also in the batteries there were casualties in personnel and losses of material. The new unobstructed position did not admit of comparison with the one that had been lost. As it consisted mainly of support points which maintained cohesion only by fire, it turned out to be very advantageous on the following day that only a part of them was located by the enemy artillery and that with respect to the tanks they presented only few points of reference.

The statements of the prisoners confirmed many impressions of the day and confirmed that the objective of the Russian offensive was the breakthrough in the direction of Orel. The attacking tanks belonged to three heavy brigades, each composed of 60 tanks of the KV-1 type, the heaviest Russian tank we had known up to that time. We collected further data on the Russian armored groupings. According to them, to our front there was the 3rd Armored Army with its three Corps, and in addition a fourth armored Corps, a motorized-mechanized Corps and six heavy armored brigades. Further examination confirmed these data, so that it was soon established that the attacker had 1,400 tanks of the T 34 and KV-1 types at his disposal.

The work in the general staff reached a great intensity, as it always happened when the were carrying out important combat actions.

The reports, requests for reports, requests and proposals followed one after the other in rapid succession. The news on the enemy situation received from the non-attacked Divisions had to be studied as well as the results of the interrogations of the prisoners, which were carried out without interruption; it was necessary to transmit to the units the data that would be useful for the conduct of the combat. It also demanded a lot of work to know with the necessary details the situation reached at night. The observation aviators had to be instructed on the center of gravity of the aerial exploration to be carried out the following morning and on the details they wanted to know. The Division under attack reported that, notwithstanding the continuous disruptive fire falling over the whole area, it had been possible to get ammunition and subsistence to the units. The consumption of ammunition was very high. The railroad to Archangelskoje provided good services.

On the basis of all the elements of judgment and data collected, it was continuously tried to determine what would be the combat conduct of the Russians to expect the next day. The opinions that were formed varied several times. It was impossible to arrive at a concrete result, because the more I was able to form a picture of the enemy's intentions and actions on the basis of the events and the statements of the prisoners, the more incomprehensible I found many aspects of the enemy's attitude. The Russians could have made demonstrations

at various points on the front and seriously attacked also at one or another place, as they did in their spring attack. In that way and without, given the troops at their disposal, having reached a dispersion of efforts, they would have prevented the gathering of the infantry, anti-tank and artillery forces, which, in spite of being so small, were of decisive importance for the maintenance of the attacked front. That the first attack was carried out without tank support was imposed by the river obstacle. It could not be explained why, instead of proceeding first with a part of the tanks to the elimination of the device of the antitank defense in depth, they had not immediately attempted the breakthrough on Orel with the mass of the tanks followed by the mass of the infantry.

Naturally, we had counted on the attempt of a mass breakthrough on Orel and that thought was of the utmost concern to me. I had reflected thoroughly, as is logical, on the conduct of the combat, which the Corps required in such a case. Its precise fixation was not possible, because it is never possible to foresee the development of a combat in all the details necessary for that purpose. The effective measures of the Russian leadership on the first day of the battle were appropriate to strengthen my confidence in spite of the enigmas of the future.

My confidence was greatly increased by the news received that night that the offensive of the 9th Army directed against Kursk had been suspended. When the Russian offensive against the 2nd Armored Army had begun, the Commander-in-Chief of the 9th Army to the right of the former, Colonel General Model, was also entrusted with the Command-in-Chief of the 2nd Armored Army, which was to take effect on the following day, July 13. This measure taken by the Commander-in-Chief of Army Group "Center", Marshal von Kluge, was criticized in the OKH as being unusual. I considered it very convenient and it also gave very good results in practice. I knew Model as a particularly gifted and energetic driver. The 9th Army, which had suffered greatly from the attack whose suspension had just been resolved, nevertheless had at its disposal numerous units and considerable heavy material. By the fact that both Armies were now under a common superior the precondition was created that units and material of the 9th Army, in so far as they could be freed up there, could also be employed on the front of the 2nd Armored Army under the responsibility of a single command.

Now there was for us the justified hope of receiving reinforcements soon, whereas until then we could not count on them. Their quantity and date of arrival were as uncertain as the answer to the question of whether we would succeed in preventing at least until then the breakthrough of the front.

The next day, July 13, the battle resumed at dawn with maximum violence. Again five divisions attacked and were supported by about 100 tanks. Of particular violence was the pressure against the left wing of the attacking belt. Parts of the forward line had to be abandoned there. The front was again strengthened by the use of the reserve battalion of the 56th Infantry Division, Saxony. Notwithstanding the tank support on the Russian side, this unequal combat ended at nightfall with the result that the greater part of the line remained in our possession and that the cohesion of the front could be maintained by the formation of several points of support, especially also by the sappers of the 262nd Division. The artillery had a great day. Even though most of the German batteries came under heavy fire, they managed to obtain great effectiveness on the enemy attacking in dense masses.

On that day the front still had only a few continuous parts of position and had largely dissolved into a zone of minor support points, which was followed by the network of broad meshes, but arranged in depth, constituted by the points of support of the heavy weapons and finally of the batteries.

In the afternoon, a new grouping of about 50 tanks tried to gain ground deep in the southern part of the attack strip. It abandoned more than half of its vehicles when it again fell back behind its infantry. A single 7.5 cm. anti-tank gun shot down 12 Russian tanks. The success of the day was achieved in a fight fought with exemplary courage and perfect cooperation of arms. The enemy left a total of 40 tanks on the battlefield.

It was a welcome moment when in the afternoon the Commander-in-Chief of the Army telephoned me to announce that two brigades of assault pieces with a total of 30 assault guns and a company of hornets, with 8 pieces, would arrive for the southern part of the Corps area at my disposal. It seemed to be only a drop of the reinforcements needed but it was a valuable aid, for our heavy anti-tank defense was thus more than doubled. Officers were immediately dispatched to bring them in. The 262nd Division proceeded to reconnoitre covered

76. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

rush sites in the combat zone. It was hoped that they would still get there during the night. The statements of the prisoners confirmed again that in front of us was the Russian 31st Armored Army which had been reinforced by several armored groupings. The scouting of the enemy's foot troops resulted in the information that we also had in front of us a foot army of 15 to 16 Divisions. Both armies were under the command of Marshal Rokossowski. Also on the night of July 13-14 work was carried on as in the previous night, with feverish activity.

On July 14, the third day of the battle, the enemy committed even larger forces than before. From the statements of the prisoners it appeared that they had attacked 8 Divisions of sharpshooters and an armored Corps with about 250 heavy tanks. The attack was made on the former center of gravity. Our artillery again acted devastatingly against the attacker. The Russian tanks attacked several times very vigorously against the depth of the position and managed to penetrate deep in some places. The assault pieces and the "hornise", which had already fought several battles against tanks, fought fiercely. The anti-tank guns of the corps competed with them. On that day 120 Russian tanks were shot down. The news that the anti-tank gun that had shot down 12 tanks the day before was attacked and flattened by three tanks and that the gunner was killed and two men were seriously wounded, caused much sadness. But earlier these men had set fire to a tank.

A large number of footholds on the most forward line had been lost. Again the remnants of their garrisons clung on in the immediate vicinity; some points of support of the most forward heavy weapons became part of the new front. The last reserve battalion, the one that had been sent by the 299th Infantry Division, Thuringia, was pawned. In the other divisions of the corps, complete quiet reigned.

The Russian prisoners were mostly young men or men who had been for a long time in baggage or rearguard units. The training of the recruits amounted to barely six months; the preparation for the new activity of the others had been even shorter. In the opinion of one officer, there were only a few well-educated officers and NCOs in the infantry. Of the tank crews, a portion had experience in fighting infantry and few had taken part in a tank fight. The Russians, like us, did not manage to compensate for the heavy casualties that 1941 had produced in their fully trained personnel. To this was still added that their numerous new creations demanded from them many officers and NCOs. Mass was obtained at the cost of quality. Thus the combat value of the Russian units was considerably reduced.

The combat value of our units had also decreased due to the fact that the replacement personnel coming from the interior or taken from the baggage and organs of the rear service, did not have a complete instruction. But the old core of the units, fully trained and very experienced in combat, although not very effective, and the continuous work on improving the training of the replacement personnel incorporated, meant that our units, despite their losses, continued to be, as before, a very good instrument for combat, considerably superior to that of the adversary.

The Russians attacked on the third day in the same manner as on the preceding days. In no aspect was it possible to notice a change of procedure or the attempt of a surprise. Their conduct of the combat produced the impression of a tactic of attrition. When a year and a half after this battle I led the Army Group "North" in East Prussia I made a similar observation. In spite of this, I was extremely worried about whether or not we could withstand a fourth day of battle fought in the same way, with our infantry extremely weakened and without any reserves, and whether the Corps would not be forced to employ another combat procedure. The units were also extraordinarily tired. It is true that we knew, from experience, that the soldier even in the most difficult situations manages to sleep for a short time and that this replenishes him to some extent, if he can do so at one time or another; but this has its limits.

On the night of July 14-15 I received the relieving news that new reinforcements had been sent, which this time were considerable given our circumstances, and that they were on the move. They were the 36th Infantry Division, a group of assault pieces with 14 guns and 9 tanks of the Ferdinand type. All of them came from the battle of Kursk. The infantry division had not lost much of its combat strength and was conducted in excellent form. The Ferdinand was, because of its weight of 65 tons and because of its mechanism which did not possess sufficient performance capacity, a not quite happy construction of a heavy tank, of which only 80 were produced; but they had an 8,8 cm. gun with a magnificent aiming device which allowed them to safely wage a

fight against tanks located up to 3 kilometers away. Their frontal armor was 20 cm. thick and could not be pierced by the 7.5 cm. gun, the weapon of the Russian heavy tank at that time; each one of them constituted a special combat force. The bad news was that these new reinforcements could not be in the fighting zone before sunset on July 15.

It was evident that the 36th Division should not be employed in a counterattack but should be used to strengthen the defense in the center of gravity belt, which had to constitute an independent Division sector to be separated from that of the 26th Division. The sector of the 262nd Division was limited to the one occupied until then by the center and right regiments of the same. The forces of this Division that until then were employed in the strip of the enemy's center of gravity were to be taken out of the front, although they were still to remain in that sector as a reserve.

On July 15, the fourth day since the beginning of the battle, we had the surprise that the Russians did not continue their attack. Thus the Corps was probably spared a dangerous crisis and we were also in a position to carry out the change of device, without being greatly disturbed by the adversary.

On the morning of the 16th the Russians began the attack at an extremely early hour. The 36th Division had opportunely occupied its sector. The attack extended, as expected, to most of the 486th Infantry Regiment, 262nd Division, neighboring the previous center-of-gravity strip. That regiment, whose 10-kilometer-wide sector was occupied only in the form of a weak, widely extended security, was made to fall back after some time and to occupy in open ground, maintaining liaison with the 36th Division, a new position in more bent arc to the rear. The Russians continued here in the morning only with strong patrols, even though they should have recognized that ahead of them there were no forces worth mentioning. They did not possess the ability to adapt quickly to the situation, as I had often noticed. That adaptation to new circumstances must not start exclusively from the superior commander, but the other chiefs, even of lower ranks, must take advantage of every favorable opportunity that presents itself.

In the previous strip of the center of gravity the Russians attacked with great power, although without success. In the morning, the enemy pledged about 300 tanks, which evidently had to force the breakthrough. He lost more than 150 of them. In the afternoon the center of gravity was shifted more towards the northern wing of the attack belt and extended to the 36th Division. The enemy managed to push back the right wing of this Division, whose trenches were occupied very meekly, in the form of a safety. The Division succeeded in forming a new front supported on the unattacked parts. In the afternoon the enemy continued his attack also against the withdrawn parts of the 262nd Division, an attack which brought this front almost to a breakthrough. In a new tank attack, the Russians lost 50 more tanks, so that in that day more than 200 were shot down. Eight Divisions of sharpshooters would have carried out this attack. The efforts of the Corps units were again extraordinarily great, similar to those of the first days of the battle. The center of gravity of the attack had widened to about 25 kilometers.

Towards noon I received the delayed communication that the 8th Armored Division was subordinated to the Corps and that it would arrive in the evening in the combat zone. Also, that 8 Ferdinand were being transported by rail to Orel. The Armored Division had lost almost all its tanks in the fighting north of Kursk. The losses of its other units were also considerable. I was faced with the decision to be made regarding the employment of this division. That decision had to be taken on the basis of the situation that had arisen in the two Divisions neighboring the former center of gravity belt, a situation that necessarily imposed the transitional splitting of the new Division.

The splitting of organically constituted groupings is one of the most inconvenient measures that a commander can adopt. It should be absolutely discarded, unless there are unavoidable reasons that impose it. They existed precisely in this case. The armored grenadier regiment of the Division was subordinated to the 262nd Division to strengthen its left wing; the 8th Armored Division itself took over a sector in the right wing of the 36th Division, a sector which had to be narrow, for the new Division had only a small strength.

One of the most important tasks carried out during the night was to obtain data that would serve as a basis for

78. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

deducing the probable center of gravity that would correspond to the target that the Russians would choose for their next attack. In view of our small forces it was of decisive importance to obtain in this respect as accurate a picture as possible, for only in this way could we be properly ordered as regards the mobile antitank defense and a part of the artillery. The most important elements of judgment were the observations of the units, which he knew through conversations with the division commanders, as well as the conclusions about the Russian combat conduct during the course of the day. Of special importance also became the result of the aerial exploration carried out shortly before dark. From all this it was deduced that the center of gravity was to be assumed, as hitherto, in the 36th Infantry Division, it being probable that it would expand to the neighboring parts of the 8th Armored Division. In front of the 56th Division a gathering of about 50 tanks was ascertained. The Division urgently requested a reinforcement in anti-tank defense. It was clear to me that the division by its own means could not prevent a breakout of these tanks; but as I did not attach decisive importance to such a breakout, I could not resolve to take a single piece out of the girdle of the center of gravity.

On July 17 the enemy attacked with ten rifle divisions and about 400 tanks in the planned center of gravity strip. After fluctuating fights, the brave 36th Division was pressed back to the height of the locality Bortnoje. To the right, in the 262nd Division, which repulsed heavy attacks, there was a clearing about 10 kilometers wide in which no infantrymen were to be found.

Also in some places groups of tanks had arrived behind the front which caused losses in the rear units. On my return trip from the 36th Division combat outpost I was pursued by three Russian tanks and was able to evade their fire only by turning quickly onto a clearing road that branched off the road. It could not be established to which direction the tanks behind the front disappeared; instead the 50 tanks that had broken on the 56th Division front were found by scouting in the same place at the onset of darkness. At night I temporarily moved 25 assault guns, taken from the center of gravity to the vicinity of that place, which, when it began to lighten, were to attack the tanks and immediately return to the strip of the center of gravity. Of these tanks, 35 were shot down with no losses of their own; the crew of the others abandoned their vehicles and dispersed. The abandoned tanks were blown up.

On the road in dismounted, to which I went before the enemy tanks, I found after some time at the tail end of a stopped mobile hiccup column, which there also had found protection against tanks that had broken through the front. Shortly thereafter, dozens of vehicles also arrived behind me, so that I was practically enclosed. My commanding officer had to cover more than a kilometer on foot to reach the head of the column and get it moving. The dismount adventure cost me a time loss of over an hour, which was augmented by a subsequent vehicle malfunction. As the poor road from the 36th Division combat outpost required almost an hour's travel, I arrived at my headquarters only after dark, having had no communication with my staff for two and a half hours.

Here I found a lot of news. The 2nd and 12th Armored Divisions were subordinated to the Corps; of them, a part of the 2nd would arrive at night to the combat zone, while the 12th could arrive only at dusk of the following day. Each of these two divisions had only 20 tanks (Panzer IV), of which only a part were armed with 7.5 cm guns. The remaining tanks were only capable of fighting infantry.

In addition, the communication arrived that the neighboring northern corps was to fold back its right wing. This obliged me to move, on the following and subsequent night, the 34th Division of Infantry from its position on the Oka and Olsa to the north bank of the Oka, with all its units.

This, in turn, was to cause the abandonment of the area around Mzensk and also the withdrawal of the left wing of the 56th Division. The arriving 2nd Armored Division was to be inserted in the right wing of the 56th Division. The resolutions and orders were of great urgency; it was equally of great haste to form a judgment as to the probable intentions of the enemy and the center of gravity of his further attacks, since here, too, the necessary orders were to be issued as early as possible. The fighting space had now been extended to 120 kilometers. In such a situation the great importance for a commander of an excellent chief of staff, of initiative, and an experienced and far-sighted general staff is especially evident.

In the afternoon, when I was in the 36th Division, I also had a relatively long telephone conversation with Colonel Staedtke, my chief of staff, who informed me of a certain uneasiness in the enemy, not previously observed in the other sectors. The aerial exploration carried out after noon confirmed the presence of a powerful mass of enemy forces in front of the 36th Division and the narrow sector of the 8th Armored Division. At least 200 enemy batteries were found to be firing here. Being in the 36th Division, I had already gathered the impression that the enemy was engaged with so many forces in the center of gravity that a fundamental shift of the center of gravity could not be expected in an attack the next day, as this would require several days.

On my return to headquarters there was no news to change that picture. Only the aviator who had made the last scouting flight reported that this time he could not give an opinion on the enemy's intentions because the entire battlefield was strewn with tanks, which he could only assume were placed out of action. He had been able to see an obvious gathering of 100 tanks in front of the front clearing between the 36th Division and the 262nd Division. As this observation at dusk was amply confirmed by ground observation, Colonel Staedtke admitted the possibility that the enemy planned to effect the next day, with these tanks, a breakthrough to the railway of vital importance to us, as a secondary operation. It was evident that everything possible should be done to prevent this.

As he had no communication with me, but he knew from a telephone conversation that the next day he wanted to leave the center of gravity of the antitank defense unchanged, he sent small units of the antitank defense, which temporarily did not seem indispensable, to a suitable preparation area and also directed there the armored group of the 2nd Armored Division that was approaching. Since it was not possible to modify the general device of the antitank defense, there remained a mosaic of four to five small units, whose meeting and conduction thus became very difficult. At the front there was no suitable commander available, so on my return I entrusted the task to Colonel Staedtke, who, like no other, was acquainted with the preparations for the action, enemy and self, besides being an experienced tank man himself. The choice could not have been better.

Staedtke succeeded in the night in assembling the forces coming from different parts. In the early morning of July 17 the 100 enemy tanks began their advance as expected, in the direction of Archangelskoje station. They clashed with frontally and flanked forces; 43 were shot down, the rest fell back. Staedtke had taken on his own initiative and under his responsibility the resolution for this combat action of special importance for the Corps. My participation consisted of no other measure than approval. He carried out the complicated assembly of the heterogeneous grouping, led it personally in the combat against the enemy doubly superior in numbers and achieved a success of maximum scope for the situation of the Corps. During the war, it almost never happened that a staff officer was to grant the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. I was very pleased that my proposal to grant this distinction to Colonel Staedtke was accepted.

In the early morning hours of that July 17, the Russians continued their assault on the center of gravity belt, using some 600 tanks, the largest number ever committed. The fight there acquired aspects of extreme violence. In spite of this, by nightfall the positions were generally in our power and 220 tanks were down in front of the front and in its depth. One Ferdinand, who was in the most advanced line, in a fruit orchard south of Bortnoje, hit 22 tanks in the morning at a distance of between 2,000 and 3,000 meters from an armored grouping that was moving obliquely with respect to the front; most of the tanks hit fell prey to the flames. If one adds the 43 tanks shot down in the south and the 50 behind the front of the 56th Division, one arrives at the extraordinarily high number of more than 300 tanks lost that day by the adversary. The consumption of ammunition had reached such an extent that the supply with the available means of transport could be met only with difficulty. Also in the other parts of the front the enemy attacked, although with considerably less intensity. Our Divisions, deployed on an excessive front, found themselves in a very difficult situation. The Russians fighting the battle on a front of 120 kilometers, had at their disposal 22 Divisions of sharpshooters, including those who were normally in front of the Corps.

In the Russian conduct of combat a methodical and systematic approach combined with extreme caution,

80. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

which had already become evident on the first day of the battle, was again reflected. The widening of the combat belt, carried out only gradually, and the use of progressively increasing forces, could produce the impression, on the one hand, of great insecurity in the conduct; this procedure showed, on the other hand, the clear tendency to avoid even the appearance of a risk. This way of conducting the combat did not impose, not even approximately, the demands to the art of the conduction and to the tactical skill of the units that, for example, would have imposed an attempt of rupture undertaken with all the forces and the operations to be carried out following it. The prospects of success of such a procedure are, as is logical, reduced and so they were in this case.

The withdrawal of the 56th Infantry Division with its left wing to behind the Oka and the employment of the 2nd Armored Division had created, in the space between the center of gravity of the fight and the Oka, circumstances that required a rapid regulation of the place. I moved, for this reason, after noon on July 17 to the combat post of the 56th Division where the commanders of the 2nd and 8th Armored Division were also to be present. The movements had been carried out without friction. The Russians were pressing in some points with greater energy. It was very doubtful whether the Divisions in their extensive fronts and their improvised and unobstructed positions could withstand a strong attack. In order not to lose the cohesion of the front in that case it was arranged to withdraw, if necessary, the 56th Infantry Division and the 2nd Armored Division to the west bank of the Oka. This would also force the withdrawal of the center of the Corps a few kilometers to about the Optucha. On this stream was to be employed also the 12th Armored Division, the first units of which were expected in the evening in the area east of Orel. The conference with the three division commanders had just ended when the approach of a Russian tank group to the undefended village was reported. We escaped thanks to the speed of our vehicles.

On July 18 the Russians attacked along the entire front of the Corps, holding the center of gravity by Bortnoje (36th Division). The enemy now pledged all his forces, so that the fighting

in the center of gravity did not lose any of the power it had shown in recent days. There he only achieved results of little importance in the other sectors, on the other hand, he succeeded in making strong irruptions. It was certain that he would exploit them the next day or in the following ones, which could not be prevented due to the shortage of our forces. The Corps, although it had a large number of Divisions, which only possessed an aliquot part of its normal strength, had in reality only small forces at its disposal. Particularly sensitive was the weakness in the infantry. In order to prevent a breakthrough on Orel, a radical measure was therefore necessary: it was decided to withdraw the Corps, which had already been the object of foresighted considerations. Neither on this occasion nor on others have I had to request the approval of my combat leadership; nor has a higher authority ever intervened in the measures adopted by me.

I ordered the withdrawal during the night of the 56th Infantry Division and the 2nd and 8th Armored Divisions to the left bank of the Oka and the employment of the 12th Armored Division on the Optucha east of Orel. Also the 36th Infantry Division was to fall back behind this stream. Following it and maintaining the link, the 262nd and 299th Infantry Divisions were also driven back to better and shorter positions; especially the former had to endure difficult fighting.

The enemy had suffered heavy losses and was badly exhausted. All along the front he had fought with tank support. On that day 200 tanks were again shot down, mostly in the sector of the 36th Division. The night movements were carried out unmolested. Still at night I received information that on the 19th the 78th Assault Division and an Austrian regiment would arrive in the fighting area, which would be subordinated to the Corps.

On the 19th the enemy followed behind our withdrawal all along the front, at first only with heavy patrols. Soon it was noticeable that his center of gravity was not oriented in the shorter direction over Orel, as had been the case up to then, but had been chosen more in a southwesterly direction, bypassing Orel. He probably wanted to avoid the lower course of the Optucha, which was a strong obstacle there, as well as a freeboard from the left

bank of the Oka. Thus it happened that his center of gravity again collided with our units which until then had fought in the center of gravity, of which the infantry especially was already very fatigued and had suffered considerable losses. For this reason I inserted the 78th Assault Division between the 36th and 262nd Infantry Divisions; in this way the width of the bands of both Divisions was considerably reduced.

The 78th Assault Division was fully motorized, had strong anti-tank defense and a part of its batteries had self-propelled gun batteries. The anti-aircraft regiment had 4 batteries with 8.8 cm. guns, intended primarily to hit air targets, but which were also very suitable for fighting tanks.

The drop-by-drop arrival of reinforcements in this battle was forced by the circumstances existing after the battle of Kursk. After the cessation of the attacks in the latter, the passage to the defense required first of all, a certain amount of time. Until the front was firmly established, a rather large number of troops was also needed, especially since the enemy still had considerable reserves at his disposal. In this way, it was only gradually possible to draw off operational units for other purposes.

If the reinforcements had arrived in large groupings, then the Corps, even if it had not been able to think of an offensive conduct, would have had the possibility of forming a reserve. The combat leadership would then have had a greater degree of security and the life of intense tension that the lack of it originates would have been avoided to a great extent. The conduct was also hampered by the fact that it was never foreseeable whether new reinforcements would be placed at our disposal.

The enemy made several tank-supported attacks on the afternoon of July 19, when the enemy made several tank-supported attacks on the afternoon of July 19. On the evening of July 19, the enemy made several tank-supported attacks. In them more than 20 tanks were shot down. The enemy did not undertake any further attacks of a certain magnitude since then. A great battle had come to an end. The impression had to be gathered that the Russians were exhausted in front of the front of the Corps. The breakthrough on Orel attempted with extraordinarily powerful forces had failed. The Russians had enormous human casualties and had also lost more than 900 tanks. They only undertook numerous small attacks, supported by tanks whose purpose was evidently the exploration and the surveillance of our front. On these occasions they suffered tank losses which up to 5 August increased the total number of tanks killed to 978. Our units were also very active and in several undertakings took prisoners and captured weapons.

At the end of July the radio and the newspapers carried the news of Mussolini's dismissal and imprisonment. Italy's withdrawal from the war was to be expected in a short time. This news did not produce a lasting impression at the front, for Italy's cooperation in the war on our side was considered of little value. I did not suspect then the significance that the expected separation from Italy was to have on my future activity. Subsequent events developed independently of the situation of the Corps, whose positions were no longer seriously attacked.

The situation in the left neighbor had become difficult in the meantime. This fact and the intention to rectify the salient of the front which in the form of a semicircle passed at a great distance around Orel, originated the resolution of the supreme command to gradually withdraw the forces which were in that arc. This was begun by withdrawing the right wing of my Corps and the southernmost parts belonging to the neighboring Corps on the right to a line some 20 kilometers further back. As the Orel-Briansk road was the only usable road also in rainy weather in the whole region, it was used by thousands of motor vehicles from the south and from the north through Orel. The task of the Corps was to regulate the traffic of baggage and rear service units of about 20 infantry and armored Divisions.

The battle of Orel was the biggest action I had to lead against the Russians up to that time. The efforts of the units against the overwhelming superiority of the enemy were unsurpassed, especially in the first periods of the battle. Units made up of personnel from the various German regions took part in these fights. All of them proved to be equally outstanding. A failure of even small fractions, especially in the first days of the fighting, would have had catastrophic consequences. I have never been able to understand the tendency existing in some,

82. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

albeit small, parts of the German people to assign a lesser military value to the population of certain regions and, naturally, also to the units formed with personnel from them. I have found that this tendency has its origin in the superficial way of thinking of people who, for the most part, have not left their village or district and who without analysis have made their own old prejudices created by a tendentious and spiritless interpretation of history. It is always a testimony to the poverty of a historian that he needs to demean others in order to praise his hero. Such speculation, relying on the lack of judgment of many men, has too often achieved its goal.

In the first days of August, the front was withdrawn by superior order to the Bolchoff-Orel-Krony road, without fighting. Immediately east of Orel there was still a bridgehead on the Oka, as the road through Orel was still required for the evacuation of vehicles from the two neighboring corps. The withdrawal on the line west of Orel was scheduled for the night of 5-6 August.

On the morning of the 5th, I received the order to report to the Führer's headquarters in Prussia. Eastern. After the withdrawal of the bridgehead and the blowing up of the road bridge over the Oka at Orel at 21:00 that day, I handed over the command of the XXXV Corps. My activity on this front was over.

1. BALCANES

Commander-in-Chief with particularly difficult mission.

Study of the situation with Löhr in Salonika.

On the morning of August 6 I flew in a Fieseler-Storch first to Bryansk, the nearest place suitable for large aircraft. It was a foggy morning, with short light drizzles. Below us, the vast wooded area east of the Desna was gloomy and eerily silent. Suddenly the river and the vast city appeared before us, and soon after we landed. The Ju-52 trimotor was ready and we flew on to Smolensk, where the Headquarters of Army Group "Center" was located, whose Commander-in-Chief was Marshal von Kluge. I found him with his left arm splinted perpendicular to his body. He had been injured again in one of his numerous automobile accidents.

I met Marshal von Kluge for the first time immediately after the Winter Battle 1941-42 and later still saw him on a few occasions. Because of his often brusque and dry manner and imposing distance, he was not highly esteemed, especially by senior commanders; in spite of this, I always got along very well with him. I must have informed him then about details of the battle of Orel; he in turn expressed to me that he had followed with intense concern the concentrations of enemy forces in front of my front and that when on July 12 in the morning came the report about the beginning of the Russian attack he had the conviction that the Corps would be scattered like chaff in the wind and that the Russians at dusk would already be in Orel. He ended by saying: "In spite of all the reports, it is still an enigma to me how you managed to achieve that result".

I then asked him about my future destination, to which he said: "You will receive the command-in-chief of an army. I do not know what it will be. The Führer called me personally on the telephone and ordered me to give you the name of a general who is especially qualified for the command-in-chief of an army with a difficult mission. And then I gave his name.

Von Kluge then spoke about the situation on the eastern front, which he regarded with great confidence. The Army Group was about to rectify the extensive arc around Orel by the withdrawal of the Desna front. The movements were being carried out methodically and should result in a gain of numerous Divisions. He was also of the opinion that the main problem of the continuation of the campaign in the east lay in the dispatch of soldiers for the combat front. The Divisions returning from the battle of Orel and from the earlier battles of Kursk and Belgorod as well as from other fighting on the eastern front, had suffered heavy losses, in which happily the percentage of wounded was, surprisingly, higher than the figures of past experience; but only a very small and insufficient measure of replacement personnel was available to fill the gaps. Thus the Group of Armies had, among its Divisions, more than a dozen which possessed scanty combat power. At that time a sufficient quantity of weapons, ammunition and fuel was still available; only the production of tanks was not enough to cover the needs.

When I boarded the plane after noon, I had the feeling that I was leaving Russia for a long time. I did not know it would be forever. Although other destinations presented me with new fighting actions against the Russian fighting forces, they were almost all fought outside the territory of Russia. My next target was Rastenburg, the airfield of the Führer's headquarters. The rainy weather had given way to a bright sunny afternoon. The flight lasted several hours.

Once again he was heading for an uncertain future. This was reason enough to indulge in reflections. But in the vague thoughts about the future, memories of the past period in Russia, of the scenery, of the men, of the often intense worries, of the many battles, of the energy-sapping resolutions, of the final successes achieved were continually mingled. With gratitude and admiration I also remembered the men I had led and who had accomplished such unprecedented feats.

The numerous combat situations were engraved forever in my memory and parade inside me almost always

84. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

without cohesion and follow each other in quick succession; however, some memories remained clear and persistent. They are those of the periods, sometimes short, sometimes longer, in which the resolutions matured and those of the moments in which they were taken. The resolution expresses the will and intention of a commander. The resolution determines the starting point of every action and its objective. Its conversion into struggles always requires new resolutions. Thus the resolution is at the heart of leadership and is also its most difficult part. When I had to make resolutions for which I had to fight in my inner self, I often remembered Napoleon's words: "Nothing is more difficult, but nothing more precious, than to be able to know how to make up one's mind.

And today all the difficulties that arise when resolutions have to be made are once again presented to me with crystal clarity. The first requirement for the formation of resolutions is the appreciation of the situation or of a part of it. And here begins the first of the difficulties. By situation we mean the totality of the facts, both on one's own side and on the enemy's side, which are of importance for carrying out an action. These facts include, on the enemy's side, its effective, the distribution of the forces, its armament and equipment, the instruction as well as the moral and physical state of the troops, the quality of the conduction, the probable intentions, the supply, etc. Of the greatest significance is that all these factors are never known with certainty and most are known only to a greater or lesser degree of probability. Important elements of judgment are often totally lacking. Nor can one's own circumstances be clearly mastered. Thus, it is often uncertain how movements are to be carried out in terms of time and space; in the course of the fighting it is not always possible to determine precisely the actual position of parts of one's own forces, nor is there any certainty as to the effectiveness of one's own weapons. To all this are still added many imponderable factors, the nature of which makes it impossible to include with precision in the calculations. The judgments to be formed about the situation therefore lack a secure basis in important respects; often no element of judgment is available at all. The large gaps in the bases and the imponderables, which are always difficult to include with precision, mean that intuition occupies a large space when forming the judgment that precedes the adoption of the decision. In addition, as in almost all judgments, there are other factors of a psychological and physiological nature, which are alien to the intellectual ones. It is precisely in these judgments that the irrational, which on so many occasions in life plays an important role, also manifests itself to a considerable extent. In spite of the fact that the elements of judgment are fluctuating, the commander must absolutely arrive at a precise judgment of the situation, which, as he already knows, will have a decisive influence on its resolution.

On the basis of this appreciation of the situation and having as a great guideline the own intention or the mission received, the resolution is configured already when the judgments are being formed, but it is, above all, when the resolution is adapted when the idiosyncrasy of the commander appears, which is added to the many determining factors. The character is what originates essential differences between men. Many people have a marked tendency to optimism or pessimism; others are distinguished by their strength of spirit and energy; others are vacillating; nervous capacity and impressionability show different degrees; some are bold and others weak and indecisive; many shy away from the strenuous struggle in dangerous periods, taking refuge in caprice or in

the scheme. Several of these qualities of character appear simultaneously in a person. Thus, for example, I have known, among others, a person of very outstanding intellectual conditions who tended to an exaggerated pessimism and who could never take a bold and energetic resolution, but who, if the burden of resolution was removed from him by an order, showed great energy in the execution of it.

The resolution, depending on the insecurity of the elements of judgment obtained, their scope and the difficulty of the situation itself, is always the result of a more or less intense struggle in the commander's innermost self.

It is natural that in my thoughts about the events of the past, the resolutions and their formation process appeared with special insistence in my memory.

Memories of my travels to new destinations live in my memory in detail. I considered those trips as milestones of my life in the war and for that reason they always demanded from me hours of introspection and

examination, as well as of justification before an uncompromising past. They were also hours of self-perfecting work without regard for myself. At the end of these trips, I always had a big question mark. And this was especially great during my trip to East Prussia.

We flew over the Russian plain. Green and brown fields, dark forests, rivers and streams, small villages with thatched roofs that time had colored gray and rarely a village of any magnitude, covered enormous surfaces that, like a gigantic film, seemed to pass before our eyes in constant repetition, awakening the impression of an infinite monotony. Not a mountain, not a hill, not a big city, nothing is seen that can attract the eye, let alone enchant it. But if one has traveled through these regions by vehicle or on horseback, in short days of walking then one knows the magnificence of these forests, the power of these endless plains and the real magnitude of this landscape. All these impressions remain strange to the one who crosses in flight. I also found here that the beauty and grandeur of a landscape appear in a very different way when we are in the middle of it than when we fly over it.

After a flight of several hours we suddenly found ourselves above a village with sunlit houses, painted white, covered with reddish-brown roofs. This was the beginning of East Prussia. Gray-white roads looked like ribbons laid over the area and numerous lakes reflected upwards the brightness of their waters. Shortly afterwards we flew low over a small lake and landed at Lötzen airfield. From there the journey continued along a concrete road and through very cleanly maintained localities to the Führer's HQ situated in a magnificent forest of tall trees. We passed through the outer belt and then the inner belt, made up of barbed wire fences, and arrived at a large wooden building, the guest house. In the immediate vicinity were, scattered in the forest, the buildings for officers and for the accommodation of the people of Headquarters and somewhat to one side, Hitler's dwelling house.

In the evening I was informed by Colonel General Jodl about my future assignment; I learned that I was appointed to be the commander-in-chief of an army to be created in the western Balkans and that for this purpose the General Staff of the 2nd Armored Army was to be taken from the front in Russia and transported to Belgrade. In Croatia, of which a coastal strip and Dalmatia were occupied by the Italians, there were at that time seven German Divisions under the command of the "Croatian Commander". The Italians had also occupied Montenegro and Albania and had a total of 15 Divisions. The Badoglio government was in negotiations with the Allies and the early separation from Italy was to be expected; the Italians were then to be considered as enemies.

While in Serbia there was almost complete tranquility, and only weak forces were at work in the command of the "Serbian Commander", in Croatia, to which Bosnia also belonged, a continuous fight was being waged against Tito's guerrillas, who were estimated at 150,000 men. I have to admit that I was very impressed by the disproportion between the strength of the actual and potential adversaries and that of my own forces. To my question as to whether I could count on other forces, Jodl replied that in the event of a separation from Italy one Division, probably two, could be transported for the time being. These circumstances were familiar to me because of their similarity to the previous ones in Russia, although there the tasks were almost always more difficult.

On August 6, 1943, I spoke to Hitler for the first time. At Headquarters two meetings were held daily for the study of the situation, which lasted several hours, one beginning at noon and the other at about 10:00 p.m. Almost always 15 to 20 people were present. Almost always 15 to 20 people were present. In the "evening situation" I introduced myself to Hitler. He expressed to me a few words of appreciation for the success in the battle of Orel and then went on to consider the situation on the eastern front. Here one could get an objective picture of the enormous extent of that front and of the very diverse circumstances in its different and wide regions. I learned here that in the area from which I had just arrived, movements had also been carried out on this day unmolested.

He then turned to consideration of the situation in the Balkans. Here Hitler addressed his words mainly to me, as the future commander-in-chief of the Western Balkans. He expressed dissatisfaction with the Croatian government, which had so far failed to organize the national defense of the country on a broader basis. The

partisan movement was increasing in volume and had to be fought with all the greater energy because in the event of an attempt by the Allies to land in Dalmatia or Albania it would mean grave danger. The foreseeable separation from Italy would create for the Balkans a new situation, because the very numerous Italian forces located in the coastal area would be transformed, overnight, into enemies and could easily form a beachhead for an Allied landing. The situation, for this reason, with the separation of Italy, required the rapid elimination of these forces. The defense and the maintenance in our power of the Balkans was of vital importance since their possession by the adversary would mean a mortal threat for the Reich Army and a danger for the southern wing of the eastern front.

Hitler spoke for about half an hour on these subjects, referring, in order to explain his thoughts better, to numerous details. His expositions were clear and definite and expressed with much energy. At times one gathered the impression that even the rapid word was too slow a medium to keep pace with his thoughts. He expressed his judgments with the assurance of precisely established facts that leave no room for the slightest doubt.

At the end of his expositions he condensed my mission with the following words: "Use the military power of Croatia; defeat Tito; if necessary, eliminate the Italians in the coastal area, if possible by taking them prisoner; occupy Dalmatia, Montenegro and Albania immediately afterwards and defend the coast yourself". The aforementioned unshakable naturalness of his exposition seemed to me to have been even more accentuated.

When I learned in outline at my evening interview with Jodl what my future task was to be, all the reflections of my reason denied the possibility of its realization. And now, when I came to know the full extent of my mission, when I thought of the enormous extent of the space which was equivalent to two-thirds of the area of pre-war Germany, to which even its 1,600-kilometer-long coastline was to be dominated, and when I had in mind the strength of the enemy and my seven Divisions, a new rebellion of my reason took place. The arguments grew pale and left only the feeling of great concern.

As my General Staff could not be assembled until August 20-25 in Belgrade, I first went to Vienna to see my family. I knew a part of the Balkans from travels and hunting excursions made during my time as a lieutenant. The Balkans is a region of the antagonisms of nature as well as of men; it is also a realm of extremes. It was a constant stormy corner of international politics during the 19th century, and it was also the starting point of the World War II. I knew that there was hardly a region in Europe that offered to the conduct of the war more difficulties than the greater part of my future region because of its high mountains, so fractioned, of scarce road, of its high dry plateaus of karst and of its shady forests. The Balkans also provide the ideal setting for partisan warfare. I knew the national characteristics of the Croats, Serbs, Bosnians and Montenegrins. I proceeded to broaden my knowledge of the history, politics, sociology, economics, literature and art of the Balkan peoples and took several books with me in my luggage for later study. In order to make early contact with reality, I made two flights over the Balkans, the first of which took me to Thessaloniki. There was the headquarters of Colonel General Löhr, who then exercised the command in chief over all the Balkans.

The flight over Western Hungary did not offer anything appealing. The picture changed as we approached Belgrade. Where the Save flows into the mighty Danube, some hills rise on the southern bank of the Save, on the westernmost of which is the city. On the northern bank of the Save, immediately opposite Belgrade, lies the large airport of Semlin, where every airplane flying to the Balkans must make an intermediate landing. The pilot received there the very important information about the weather, because flights in the Balkans are exposed to special dangers. The greatest danger is constituted by storms that suddenly appear, with elementary power, in the middle of beautiful weather; when crossing them, the airplane falls hundreds of meters until the propellers find a support again. In this way numerous airplanes crashed on the steep slopes of the mountains and some time passed until the aviators gathered the indispensable experiences. Planes were also ordered to fly at altitudes at least 1,000 meters above the highest elevations of the air route, all the more so since many chart elevations are erroneous. During the time required for orientation and refueling, I contemplated the beautiful picture presented by the city rising above the slope of the hill. As I found out on a later occasion, the city

promised much more than it could deliver when you stayed in it.

The flight continued in warm and sunny weather, at least over the Morava valley that runs through the most fertile region of Serbia. Soon after we approached the Cemernik massif to the left and the Kapovnik mountain range to the right; while below us high mountains rose. We flew over one of the most rugged regions of the Balkans. In it lie the nations of the Vardar, which winds its way southward through a deeply recessed ravine. The romantic beauty of this valley, expressed in many folk songs, I could not appreciate it from the height of the plane and only suspect it.

From Belgrade the plane, on its flight to Thessaloniki, followed in general the road that from the Danube area runs first through the valley of the Morava and then through that of the Vardar to finally reach the Aegean Sea. There is hardly any other road along which so many peoples and also the soldiers of so many nations have marched as this one which appears as a thread of dirty white wool. Along it marched Dorians, Illyrians, Romans, Goths, Servians, Bulgarians, Avars, Byzantines, Turks, Crusaders, Austrians, Germans, French and English. The history of its construction in the different historical ages, starting from the natural path offered by the terrain to the concreted road of the present, would show the evolution of one aspect of civilization in the past three thousand years. Such thoughts were interrupted as the coastal plain in the area of the mouth of the Vardar suddenly appeared before my eyes. The plane descended 2,000 meters and continued to descend lower and lower. The Aegean Sea, smooth as a mirror, shimmered sky blue. Shortly after, the city of Thessaloniki came into view in the near distance, its white color enchanting.

The plane still made a big curve over the sea in order to descend to landing altitude and land at the airfield located near the shore. There we were treated to an impressive view of the city as seen from the sea.

He had been with Löhr in the Ministry of National Defense in Vienna for several years and knew this highly educated and cultured person very well. He always showed outstanding qualities as a combat aviator, staff officer, organizer and commander of troops; but he always avoided even the appearance of wanting to put himself in the limelight. His exaggerated modesty meant that in the Luftwaffe he was finally displaced by others who did not measure up to his abilities.

The conditions I found in the Balkans in August 1943 are largely due to the characteristics of the peoples who had their seat there and their historical development. In no region of Europe do so many different peoples live in so narrow a space: Croats in Croatia, to which Dalmatia and Slavonia also belong, as well as in parts of Bosnia; Serbs in Serbia, Montenegro and also in parts of Bosnia; then Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, in their respective States and, finally, Macedonians in the border areas of Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. Turkey arrives with an important part of its territory to the Balkans and Turks also live in Albania and Bosnia. These peoples differ not only in the political aspect but also in the racial aspect.

According to research carried out by Italian and Croatian historians in the period before the IGM, the Croats would be a branch of Ostrogothic origin which, when the Ostrogoths began their emigration in the 3rd century, remained in the region of present-day Poland; the Croats adopted the Slavic language of the Poles who arrived later, but did not mix with them. After almost two centuries, that branch was evicted by the Poles and migrated along the same route that the mass of the Ostrogoths had previously followed, arriving in the 7th century in the region it now inhabits.

The Serbs are Slavs; in the 7th century they came from the region of the great rivers of today's Southern Russia to their present region. The Montenegrins are Serbs; they populated their region of difficult access and poor roads in the 14th century in the escape from the Turks who, in the battle of Kosovo in 1378, destroyed the Serbian kingdom.

Bulgarians are of Ugro-Finnish origin.

Albanians consider themselves descendants of the Pelasgians, the legendary primitive inhabitants of the Balkans.

The Macedonians see in the ancient Macedonians their ancestors; but they seem to be, in the same way as the Greeks, the only race in the Balkans in which several peoples have mixed.

The Greeks consider themselves the descendants of the ancient Hellenes; but their admixtures with Slavs and

88. *Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic*

Albanians cannot be disregarded. Of these peoples, the Croats, Serbs and Albanians have remained completely free from all intermingling of blood. This was due to the constant enmity in which the Balkan peoples lived among themselves as well as, and very especially, to the well-marked religious antagonisms.

Three major religions predominate in the Balkans. The Croats and a part of the Albanians are Catholics; the Serbs, Montenegrins, Greeks and Bulgarians are Greek Orthodox; a part of the Croats and Serbs living in Bosnia and a part of the Albanians adopted in the period of Turkish rule the Mohammedan religion. The Turks who came to these regions during the extension of their rule and who also remained there afterwards, keep their religious belief firm.

Nowhere has the influence of religion on the external conditions of life been greater than in the Balkans. The men there were always fanatical supporters of their religion and intolerant to a high degree against other beliefs. I still remember a visit made in 1910 to Croatia. On a walk in the outskirts of a small town I was struck by a surprisingly well-kept isolated house. When I asked my companion who lived in it, he answered me: "a bad person; he is a Slavic Pravo". Slavic Pravo is the name given to the Serbs who lived in Croatia, of Greek Orthodox religion. And in 1943 I found in Bosnia two neighboring villages, one of which was Catholic and the other Greek Orthodox; between them there was open hostility, which sometimes manifested itself in bloody fights with weapons.

At the time, Turkish rule had extended over the entire Balkan region, except for Croatia proper, Dalmatia and Slavonia, which were part of the Habsburg monarchy. The 19th century brought the gradual withdrawal of the Turks from Europe and the liberation of the Balkan peoples from their yoke. But the after-effects of this centuries-long domination are still felt today by the peoples who were subjugated at that time. This is one of the reasons why the culture of Croatia, which has been influenced and oriented by Central Europe, differs profoundly from that of the other Balkan peoples. The University of Agram was a prestigious institute of learning; art and literature reached a respectable height. The city of Agram with its harmonious buildings, among which the baroque style was well represented, is not inferior to any city of the center of Europe of equal magnitude and surpasses a good number.

When the Yugoslav state was created after the World War I, Croatia was part of it. The Croats were in a difficult situation from the very beginning, as they were in a minority and, moreover, had fought in that World War on the side of the Central Powers. In the general management of Yugoslavia they were deprived of any influence for a long time. There were, on the other hand, influential circles, especially Serbs, who were of the opinion that the Croats and Serbs were branches of the same Slavic stock and were therefore one people. This theory was used to increasingly centralize the state, which initially had a federal constitution, thus further reducing the independent Croatian administration. The economic policy directed from Belgrade soon brought the banking service as well as industry and wholesale trade almost exclusively into Serbian hands. The people felt with distaste, albeit helplessly, the growing oppression that encompassed broad aspects of life. The aversion of the Croats against the Serbs reached the point of hatred. A special representative of centralization was King Alexander I who, for this reason, was called in Serbia "le roi unificateur". In the autumn of 1934 he was shot dead in Marseilles by Croatian conspirators.

It is a fact proved by experience that we understand a state of affairs better if we follow the evolution that produced it. It was, therefore, of great interest and highly instructive for me to analyze with Löhr, the excellent connoisseur of the Balkans, for many hours, well into the night, the course and the intimate causes of the events at the end of which the then present was to be found.

After the defeat of Yugoslavia in the war with Germany in April 1941, all the accumulated tension of the political and social situation broke out in Croatia. The German soldiers met practically no resistance when they entered Croatia and were greeted as liberators. Croatia was immediately established as a free state, led by Ante Pavelic, who years earlier had had to flee to Italy because of persecution by the Serbian government. While the German units were in some Croatian localities, a fierce persecution of the Pravo Slavs began on the Croatian side. It was said that on that occasion more than half a million of them were killed. Characteristic of the prevailing mentality is the reply I received in August 1943 from a high official in the entourage of the Croatian

head of state, whom I had known for a long time, when I told him that in spite of the hatred accumulated among the people, I could never understand the massacre of half a million people. I received the reply: "Half a million is a slander. It was only 200,000". Against such a way of thinking in the Balkans nothing can be done with arguments. When during my command there were indications that persecutions of Pravo Slavs were being prepared again, this reaction gave me the impression that I was not able to understand what was going on.

The only way to combat it was by means of energetic measures, until finally by the threat of the use of force.

The development of partisan warfare was due, above all, to a tradition that goes back centuries and has been constantly nurtured: that of the existence of partisans in the Balkans. The partisan is one of the national heroes of the Balkan peoples. Since ancient times he carries the designation of haiduk. Its tradition begins several centuries ago, at the time when the Turks began to extend their rule over the Balkans. It is true that they succeeded in subduing the various peoples; but in the freedom-loving peoples there always arose again the small war waged by small groups, often also only by isolated brave men. In the struggle against the cruel methods of the Turks the traditional cruelty of the partisan struggle also developed. The partisan could not expect any forgiveness from the enemy and did not give it either. The population secretly supported the partisans, prevented them, supplied them with food and clothing and hid them from their persecutors. The heroic deeds of the partisans were glorified in many songs. Their memory lived on in these songs, even after the liberation of the villages from Turkish rule. In school books we still find today the old heroic songs as well as various accounts of the actions of the population in aid of these men. The Croatian people, who were never subdued by the Turks, have only the tradition of the small war of the neighboring peoples, because they covered the guard of the Habsburg monarchy against the Turks along the so-called "military frontier"; but they were keenly interested in the fate of the Balkan peoples, so that they intimately felt and shared the struggle of the partisans. Thus, only a short step was needed for the spiritually living historical memory to become a reality again through action. For its initiation some other preconditions were required.

The partisan war began first in Serbia. The country was completely quiet after its occupation in April 1941. For the war against Russia numerous German units were taken out of the country, so that during the summer only a few Divisions and security units remained. In July, partisan fighting broke out in many parts of the country at the same time. It was carried out by blowing up soldiers, single vehicles and columns of vehicles, small faction lodgings and also by blowing up road and railroad bridges and by mining roads. In addition, extremely ingenious ambushes were prepared, in which even companies and battalions suffered heavy losses. The traditional ruthlessness of partisan warfare reappeared for the first time in these fights. The weak units had to wage at first a difficult and savage struggle to simply defend life. It was obvious that partisan warfare had to be fought actively if it was to be mastered. In such fights the units were forced to answer the partisan procedures harshly if they did not want to jeopardize their own existence. After a few months the acute danger of the partisan insurrection in Serbia was eliminated.

The partisans who appeared in Serbia in 1941 were clearly divided into two groups. One of them was organized by Tito, with a communist tendency, with which he managed to attract many workers from the industrial regions of Serbia and also Belgrade youth circles. The organizer of the other group was the Serbian Colonel, later General, Draza Mihajlovic. The partisans led by him, who were called tschetniks, represented Serbian nationalist thinking. Tito and Mihajlovic were from the beginning rivals and at the beginning only the fight against the common enemy kept them united. The Tschetniks, except for small unimportant groups, gave up the fight which caused them great losses and which was then considered to be without prospects, after the energetic German countermeasures, and plunged back into the population or retreated to the forests located at a great distance. Tito's partisans were evicted from Serbia and moved in the autumn to Bosnia, which at that time was part of Croatia. They formed the nucleus of Tito's future fighting force in that country.

In spite of the prevailing animosity of the Croatian people against the Serbs, the feeling of broad circles of the population was decidedly against the bloody outbursts of the new Croatian regime against the Pravo-Slavs, all the more so since, in the same way, Croats disaffected with it were also subjected to such outbursts. These

circumstances and the increasingly manifest domination of a clique, deeply repulsed important parts of the Croatian population, not only the Pravo-Slavic parts. When Tito began to recruit personnel, he was joined by many Croats from these circles and from the Pravo Slavs who never felt safe from persecution.

A further reason for discontent in Croatia was the Italian mortgage brought by the head of state Pavelic, who was returning from exile in Italy. This proved to be catastrophic because the Croatians had for centuries maintained an aversion against the Italians, which went as far as enmity. In order to be able to refuse Mussolini's request for the occupation of Southern France and to be able to compensate him, the Reich government, in ignorance or disregard of the dominant public spirit in Croatia, recognized this country as a zone of Italian influence. The political-psychological blunders went so far that an Italian prince was crowned king of Croatia. Even though he never set foot in the country, the population was in an uproar to the highest degree. These feelings were also directed against Germany, which shortly before had been hailed as liberator and was now held responsible for the political developments. The affluence towards Tito was, for that reason, increasing considerably. Many of his supporters came from the Croatian intellectual circles, such as artists and students, who joined Tito's ranks for this reason.

Tito's partisans thus consisted of a small number of communist workers (Croatia is almost exclusively a country of farmers, since the industry is still in its infancy), then of a preponderant part of Croatians opposed to the regime and of persecuted Pravo-Slavs. In addition there were many men from areas where the partisans had been for a more or less long time unmolested and who were forced to join the partisans. It is natural that Tito would try by all means of propaganda and instruction to convert them into communists. The masses, however, did not know what it was all about. Conversations with numerous partisan prisoners provided us with interesting elements of judgment in this respect. A Croatian (and I want to emphasize this expressly) who had played an important role in the cultural life of his country and had joined the partisans, was taken prisoner in the winter of 1943. When asked by the officer taking the statements how he was able to join the communists, he answered that the partisans were only a small percentage of communists and that he did not consider Tito himself as a hundred percent communist. It took longer in Croatia than in Serbia before a partisan movement developed. The first small beginnings date back to the late autumn of 1943.

It was natural that in the conversation with Löhr the international law aspect of the partisan struggle should also be touched upon. Since April 1941 Serbia had been a defeated and occupied country, in which there had been peace for a few months, when in July of the same year the partisans resorted to arms. Already for that reason alone their struggle was, according to the Hague Convention, contrary to the law of nations and they themselves were outside the law of war. Moreover, they did not fulfill the other preconditions of the lawful conduct of war, which above all consists in the wearing of uniform or insignia recognizable from a distance and in respect for the laws of war. The same applies to the partisan movement in Croatia led by Tito. This movement had been gradually spreading throughout the country up to the gates

of the main cities. It reached the Croatian coastal area occupied by the Italians and Montenegro, also occupied by the Italians. In the winter of 1942 and in the spring of 1943 actions of some magnitude were undertaken jointly with the Italians, against the partisans, in which the latter suffered heavy setbacks, but from which they soon recovered.

Löhr expressed very favorable opinions about Tito's ability as an organizer and leader. It is true that Tito was favored by the weakness in numbers of the German units and the prevailing antipathy in the country against the Agram regime. He also knew how to take advantage of the attitude of the Italians, who although occasionally fought openly against the partisans, secretly provided them with arms and ammunition through semi-official channels. In any case, neither the Serbian tchetniks nor the Greek partisans could compare with Tito's organization. In order to lead his forces, he had organized them into several independent brigades; the masses he formed into Divisions. The brigades and the Divisions were grouped into Corps. These units were not equivalent to the usual units of an army. Thus a partisan Division had a strength of 3,000 to 5,000 men, who

were armed with rifles and machine guns. In some there were isolated cannons and grenade launchers. At that time the existence of 34 Divisions and as superior groupings 8 Corps had been ascertained.

In Croatia only a very small part of the German units were in the cities, because the mass was in the localities along the most important roads and railways. As the German troops were not sufficient for an unobstructed occupation of the country, there were always some regions where the partisans accommodated a part of their forces as well as organized depots of all kinds, workshops, rudimentary hospitals and schools. Also the priests of those regions performed their religious functions without being disturbed. Many partisans attended mass.

When a German action evicted them from one region, they settled in another. At that time there were such regions in the northeastern part of Croatia and in Western Bosnia. In order to dominate the country, a permanent mobile employment of troops was therefore required on the German side.

A part of the partisans lived almost always as peasants or peaceful workers, hiding their situation among the civilian population, which in part sympathized with them; another part did not dare to proceed against them for fear of reprisals. These, called "home partisans", were particularly dangerous because they were the ones who carried out the surprise attacks against vehicles or isolated soldiers, the mining of roads and the blowing up of bridges and railways. This activity was highly favored by the support they received from the population and in many cases only with this support could they carry it out. That is why it was an act of self-defense for the units to retaliate also against the population so that it would refrain from favoring the partisans. Without these measures, the bloody losses of the units, by hand blows and treacherous assaults, would have increased enormously. It is not in the idiosyncrasy of the soldiers to retaliate against the population; they find it repugnant. That is why they limited themselves to what was absolutely necessary.

The partisans were the first problem in the Balkans. The Italians were the second as soon as their separation had to be reckoned with. In the Balkans there was, at that time, the Italian Army Group "Est", whose headquarters were in Tirana, the capital of Albania. To this Army Group belonged the 11th (German) Army in Greece, with which I had nothing to do. In Albania, Montenegro and in the Croatian coastal region there was, however, the Italian 9th Army with its headquarters also in Tirana. It was composed of 5 to 6 Army Corps, 15 Divisions and several armored groups and battalions of blackshirts. These were the forces that interested me directly.

Since the end of 1942, the Italians' behavior was very cold. This was linked to the repudiatory attitude of the military circles towards Mussolini and the dislike of sharing the burden of the fight against the partisans. After the fall of Mussolini, there were undeniable tensions between German and Italian units in the Balkans. This state of relations is to be attributed in the first place to the commander-in-chief of Army Group "Est" in Tirana. When the only hour came for him when he should have shown his ability, he failed completely. But this will be discussed later. This unfriendly state of mind of the Italian ruling circles in the Balkans was not to be overlooked.

From the military point of view, it was of transcendental importance that in the jurisdiction of the Italians were the regions of high mountains, of scarce roads and of little passability, which separate the coast from the interior of the country. It would have been very easy for these numerous forces, supported by this terrain which greatly favors the defense, to form wide beachheads under whose protection the Allies could make a landing without being disturbed. Already the formation of such a beachhead, even without an immediate intention of landing, would have to be of the utmost scope in the Balkan situation and in the German war drive. We knew that in the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Winston Churchill had defended, with much energy, the realization of a landing in the Balkans. It was only after the war that we learned that only with great difficulty the American General Marshall was able to make him give up this project.

Even today it is still unclear to me why the Allies, who had taken Sicily in August of that year, gave up the attack on the Balkans and instead fought their way painfully through the narrow Italian peninsula, in struggles that demanded many months and cost many losses, and finally made the landing on the southwest coast of France, far removed from the decisive regions. The difficulties presented by the Balkans because of the terrain

92. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

and the reduced number of good roads should not be underestimated. These difficulties could have been overcome all the more easily if the enemy already had the most difficult terrain in his possession by means of beachheads. It was known from General Mihajlovic, whose tschetniks had given up fighting in large numbers in the autumn of 1941, that in case of an Allied landing he would act again.

As far as Tito was concerned, I later received the news that he had received from Moscow the directive that in case of an Anglo-American landing in the Balkans, he should turn against the Allies. I could not believe in such a directive, although it corresponded to the general line of Russian policy, which zealously considered the Balkans as an exclusive zone of its influence. I am convinced that the abandonment of the intention of a landing in the Balkans in 1943 postponed the decision of the war by one year. It could only have been founded on the fact that at that time Allied preparations were not sufficiently advanced. Given the great condescension shown by the Allies in their negotiations with Russia, it also seems that the Russian demand to consider the Balkans as a zone of influence exclusively their own, which was not to be trodden upon by the Western powers, must have influenced this decision. I anticipate events by stating here that a radiogram of Tito, captured in the early spring of 1944, clarifies the situation in this respect. It would not be the first time in history that politics had intervened to the detriment of the conduct of war.

I did not see much of Thessaloniki, as the conversation with Löhr absorbed all my time. I wanted to leave for another opportunity to satisfy also here my tendency to study the traces of the ancient Greeks. In the IGM Salonika was the starting point of the Anglo-French offensive, which contributed, to a great extent, to the decision of the war. The Salonika area was to acquire the utmost importance in the face of a new landing intention that entered the field of possibility.

For that reason I was very interested in knowing the local conditions. On the return flight to Vienna the next day, I therefore took the route via Sofia, which generally follows the Struma valley, the second line of invasion into the western Balkans. My attention was concentrated on the ground below me until the intermediate landing at Sofia. But then I was increasingly crowded by the impressions I had gathered from the conversation with Löhr until they completely dominated my thinking. The most difficult problem seemed to me to be that of the Italians; but already the first indications for its solution were beginning to take shape. In any case, it was clear that here one could not proceed in the normal, fighting way and that if it came to the separation of Italy one had to assign to speed in action and to surprise, a fundamental role.

2. Balkans

Before the decision. The Italian surrender.

A few days later I flew to Agram, the capital of Croatia, in order to make contact with the Croatian head of state and the military authorities there. The Poglavnik (this was the official designation of the Croatian head of state) lived in the upper part of the city, in the beautiful baroque style building where, during the imperial era, the Banus of Croatia had his residence. A large military reception was prepared for me, in which, as in the previous lunch, all the elements of representation of the State were mobilized.

Pavelic gave the impression, in spite of the hectic life he had led, of a calm man of good judgment. In conversation he smilingly expressed to me that in the first years of his emigration to Italy he had lived under my surname. His great concern was the action of the partisans. He fully realized that his regime could not be sustained without German troops in the country. His government measures up to that time were not appropriate to cement his regime in the people. Nor did I find in him any constructive ideas which would remedy this state of affairs. Perhaps it could not be found in that regime that had brought an Italian king to the Croatians either. In any case, I realized clearly on that occasion that I should not expect help from that side, perhaps not because of ill will, but because of a lack of capacity.

Later on, serious disagreements arose because of the Croatian government's policy against the Pravo Slavs. My visit at that time was the first and only one during the ten months of my command in the Balkans. This caused me the resentment of the German Minister Plenipotentiary in Agram, Kasche, and of the Reich Foreign Minister, and gave rise to several unsuccessful interventions on their part against me before Hitler.

The Croatian Army troops, comprising about eight brigades, were subordinate to the commander of the German troops in Croatia. Their combat value was low as they were suffering from widespread popular sentiment. They also feared reprisals against members of their families. As a result, there were many desertions. One part of the Croatian fighting forces was the Ustacha; it consisted of a Division which was located in Agram and several independent brigades and battalions. The Ustacha depended exclusively on the Croatian government; the Division located in Agram formed the Poglavnik's guard. The Ustacha soldiers were the mortal enemies of the partisans; the fights against them were fought with the utmost cruelty, in accordance with the Balkan tradition.

In Agram I also met General von Glaise-Horstenau, who was the German general to the Croatian government. He came from the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, had the cultivated mentality of the general staff officer, and was a military historian of high standing. I was very grateful to him for having frankly communicated to me his views on the prevailing circumstances in the Balkans. On different subsequent occasions his accuracy was proved.

Taken as a whole I was little satisfied with my stay in Agram. In Vienna I had several days available to sort out the many impressions gathered in the Balkans as far as my future task was concerned and to make the first trials of their utilization. Even if in the expected separation from Italy I could not see a decisive turning point of the war, it might be the point.

of far-reaching developments. And the unprecedented problem that arose made me realize that I was most probably called upon to play a part in the development of historical events that could represent grave dangers for the Reich. It was also clear to me that the further development of the partisans had to be interrupted, not only by powerful blows, but also that the greatest possible damage had to be inflicted on them by a continuous small war.

94. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

In all my reflections I always came up against the limits imposed by the available forces. In retrospect, which I can now extend to the entire war, I can affirm that for none of my many tasks did I ever have forces which, in terms of numbers, were able to meet their requirements. It was understandable that the great general numerical superiority of our adversaries was also manifested in the parts of the army that I commanded. We were used to fighting against numerical superiority. The greater effectiveness of the adversary had to be compensated by the superior fighting courage of the German soldier and by an equally superior leadership. We were also favored by the psychological factor that our adversaries, as a rule, judged us exaggeratedly as for the number of our units and that of our combat means. But in the present case, our own numerical inferiority reached a point that was not surpassed on any other previous or subsequent occasion. No matter how many calculations I made, the ratio of the German forces which in the first week after the separation could be disposed against the Italians was 1:20, in some parts even 1:40 with respect to those of the Italians.

On August 24 I flew to Belgrade where the headquarters of the 2nd Armored Army was assembled from Russia. Also there was Colonel, later General, von Grolman, recently appointed Chief of Staff of the 2nd Armored Army, who soon became a valuable collaborator in the difficult political and military problems of the Balkans. Here I also received the note with the order concerning the organization of the military conduct in the Balkans which was to take effect on 26 August. All the fighting forces were placed under the command of Army Group F, whose command in chief was exercised by Marshal von Weichs. The Army Group consisted of the 2nd Armored Army, to whose jurisdiction belonged at first Croatia, later also Dalmatia, Montenegro and Albania, and of Army Group E, in Salonika, which was bordering Greece. Serbia was administered by a Military Commander who reported directly to the Army Commander-in-Chief (OKH) and only in purely military matters also to the Commander-in-Chief of Army Group F. I chose as the seat of my headquarters the small town of Kragujevac, situated about 120 kilometers south of Belgrade. On August 26 the General Staff moved there.

In the meantime I had had enough time to visit Belgrade. The core of the city is located on a hill that descends to the north to the Save. The beautifully laid out, wide main street also passes through here. Many buildings show the sober lines of modern residences or business houses. Interspersed among them are several very arrogant modern constructions, of different styles, which bring a note of unwelcome uneasiness to the picture of the main road.

The city reaches from the west to a steep hill, the Kalimegdan, on which there is a small park; it is crowned by an ancient fort, perfectly preserved. On a high plinth rises in bronze the figure of a life-size youth raising a wreath of laurels, a symbol of victory, in memory of the IGM. From there one enjoys a beautiful view over the valley of the Save, which runs down to a good depth and in the distance over the plains of Slavonia and Western Serbia. Towards the north, beautiful avenues of many kilometers in length leave the city, bordering the residences, framed in parks, of the rich merchants. The main avenue passes by the so-called "White Palace" in which in the past the prince regent Paul had lived and at that time served as lodging for the Commander-in-Chief of the F. Army Group.

The excellent wide concrete road to Kragujevac passes continuously over gently hilly terrain, covered with crops. We crossed also through a number of villages, with well-preserved houses, all built of stone bricks and roofed with bricks or tiles. Halfway there was the small town of Topola, which attracted attention because of the high dome of its cathedral, visible from great distances. Here are the tombs of the last Serbian kings.

Kragujevac is a small country town where the Serbian arsenal is located, which at the time was totally destroyed by an air raid. The large administration building was the only thing intact and we set up part of our offices there. In front of the building was the bronze statue of King Alexander I, representing the marching king. This monument made a great impression on me for being full of life and for the vigor that the artist knew how to bring to the movement. In that sense it reminded me of Colleoni's statue on horseback in Venice.

It soon became apparent that the cramped conditions in Kragujevac greatly hindered the work of my General Staff, so the Headquarters was immediately moved to Vrnjac- kabanja, a small spa town in southern Serbia,

located about 200 kilometers south of Belgrade. This locality possessed some very potent sources of carbonic acid, which were already used by the Romans for curative purposes. At that time, because of the war, they were abandoned by bathers as well as several hotels and guesthouses and a certain number of houses that were scattered among gardens and thus also from the point of view of anti-aircraft defense constituted a favorable accommodation. The high Serbian mountains spread their branches from the south to this locality. About 20 kilometers to the west is the small town of Kraljevo, where a large airfield is located.

As long as the Italian problem was not solved, it was not possible to think of great undertakings against the partisans. There was practically no contact with the Italians. They were carefully concerned that no German troops should arrive in their region, not even in pursuit of partisans. On the demarcation line they were quite reserved. We only had the right to the joint use of the airfields of Zara and Tirana; from Tirana the aerial exploration against the Mediterranean and North Africa started. With the commander-in-chief of the Tirana Army Group was a German liaison staff.

It was important to know the state of mind of the Italian units. It was known that the political circumstances in Italy were also reflected in the Army and that there was a so-called "loyal to the King" current and a Fascist current; the antagonism between the two was further intensified when Mussolini was deposed. The state of mind of the troops could be described as war-weariness. The officers' contact with the troops was poor and their authority only meager.

These circumstances, which had been established on the basis of observations made long ago and confirmed and amplified up to the present, were of great importance in determining the manner in which I resolved to proceed against the Italians. It was impossible to appear against them with numerous forces, as no such forces were available. A large part of the units were, moreover, tied up in the fight against the partisans. On the other hand, the 2nd Armored Army had only foot units at its disposal at that time. Their distance to the Italian region was from 100 to 400 kilometers. Each Division had a limited number of motor vehicles that did not allow it to motorize more than a battalion. For this reason, for an advance against the Italians, only a few battalions could be considered. This advance was to consist of a surprise appearance, by way of a shock, of isolated motorized battalions in the most important troop areas of the Italian jurisdiction, which was to be followed by an exhortation to surrender. It was to be simulated that strong operational units were marching ahead.

I was fully aware of the enormous risk of such a procedure; but I could find no other solution. The extraordinarily reduced forces and the matter at stake imposed an equally extraordinary risk. The resolution in this respect was not simple. Since in the case of an Italian resistance it was not possible to count on a full return of these detachments, other units were to follow behind them with the mission of seizing the most important passes of the mountain chains in Croatia and Albania in order to prevent their occupation by the Italians. As these units, too, could only be weakly effective, the new units promised to me by the Supreme Command were to be employed, if necessary, in the fight for the mountains. I realized that in case of an Italian resistance this measure would also be very problematic, since also this second wave of the forces was very weak and could start the advance late, since it had to bridge the distances almost only by marches on foot.

Five divisions were ordered to keep one motorized battalion each ready in case of alarm. The objectives for these battalions were the coastal cities of Zara, Split, Ragusa (Dubrovnik) in Dalmatia, as well as Durazzo and Valona in Albania. These addresses covered the entire region where Italian troops were located. Only one Italian Division was far to the north in the vicinity of Senj, south of Fiume and therefore outside that jurisdiction. The forces were lacking to include it. I remember this as it later gave rise to a disagreement with Hitler. Simultaneously with these battalions, units were determined to follow by foot marches behind them. A closer approach of these forces to the demarcation line would not have been hidden from the Italians. It was to be avoided at all costs, so as not to arouse in them even the thought of a countermeasure.

On September 3, it was learned that the Allies had landed on the southern tip of Italy. With the beginning of the fight for Italy, the Allied operations had reached the vicinity of the Balkans, since the Adriatic Sea, which separates them, is on average only 100 kilometers wide.

96. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

The following days were devoted, as the previous ones, to small fights and undertakings against the partisans in Croatia, in which special attention was devoted to leaving free and secured the roads to be used by the units destined to act against the Italians.

On September 7 I received the news that on the following day an infantry division would begin its landings in Belgrade and that a reinforced motorized infantry regiment (two battalions and a light artillery group) would arrive via Croatia under the jurisdiction of the Army. Both units were subordinated to the Army.

On September 8 at 17:00 the army radiotelegraphic listening service reported that Marshal Badoglio, head of the Italian government after Mussolini had been deposed, had announced the signing of Italy's capitulation to the Allies. An inquiry to the OKW resulted in nothing being known about it, both there and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The units coming into consideration were enlisted to march on September 9 at 04:00. As there were two Italian Army Corps in and around Zara, of which 30,000 men were in that city and its vicinity, I had the battalion advancing on that city accompanied by the Colonel and Chief of Staff of the XV Mountain Corps and entrusted him with the direction of negotiations for the signing of a capitulation in that area. The battalion advancing to Tirana through Durazzo was accompanied by the officer of the Army Command-in-Chief, who had the mission of inviting the commander-in-chief of the Italian Army Group in Tirana to surrender. At 20:00 I was telephoned by Colonel General Jodl and informed me that the news of the Italian capitulation responded to reality. The code word "Axis" was then imparted to the units. On September 9 at 04:00 the march began.

The time that elapses between the issuing of an order and its execution is always, in difficult or uncertain situations, a period of great tension for the chief, and this tension is all the more intense the fewer the means at his disposal with which he could intervene in the various cases of failure that may arise in the execution. I have often found myself in such tense situations.

And on that September 9, such a situation arose once again, which differed from previous ones by its unusually long duration and because the realization of one's own intention was even more uncertain than ever before. In this case, imponderable factors and coincidences could play an extraordinarily large role. The intention of the adversary was beyond all appreciation. Naturally, the battalions had received only very general instructions and were to proceed completely independently of each other. Their starting points were up to 400 kilometers away from their objectives; the route of most of them followed mountain roads, the difficulty of which could not be compared with any of the other roads in Europe. The journey of the battalions was a journey into uncertainty; the uncertainty could not be greater in every respect. Thus, for example, the battalion headed for Durazzo had to pass through the jurisdiction of an Italian Army Corps in Northern Albania, then through the city of Tirana where the headquarters of the Italian Group of Armies, that of the 9th Italian Army as well as a Division were located, the latter to Durazzo, where a Division was also located. It was completely doubtful whether the battalions would ever return.

I had had enough time to reflect on the procedure to follow against the Italians; but given the few forces available I found no other solution than the one chosen. Thoughts about this situation were insistently presented to me throughout the day. Even if I did not want to relive the 9th of September, I would not want to lose the memory of its somber gravity that forced me to commit all the strength of my spirit and soul.

While the company's initial plan took into account the possibility of failure, the measures foreseen for that eventuality must have been unsatisfactory. The new units arriving brought, it is true, some relief. In Southern Serbia there were only weak German forces, while in neighboring Albania there was a large part of the Italian forces, some of which were also north of the mountains. For this reason the new forces were set in motion in their entirety towards Southern Serbia. Once the separation from Italy was a fact, the landing stations of the new Division were moved forward from Belgrade to Southern Serbia, where it was still some 400 kilometers from the coast.

At about 5:00 p.m. the picture of the day began to change fundamentally. From the battalion sent to Ragusa a radiogram was received communicating to have reached the march objective and that it had found in the Italians

a state of mind favorable to its own intention. From the other three battalions arrived until 20:00 parts of a similar text. Only from the battalion sent to Split no news was received at this time. At 8:00 p.m. the staff officer sent to the commander-in-chief of the Italian Army Group, to whom he was to deliver the exhortation to surrender, reported that the Italian commander-in-chief had told him that in view of the importance of the invitation he could not give a reply before September 14, i.e. not before five days. At the same time a radiogram of Marshal Badoglio was received in which he ordered the Italian forces in the Balkans to resist the German troops.

From the reports received one had to deduce the fact that the invitation to surrender addressed to the Italian troops had met with a surprisingly favorable reception, but that from the side of the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Group of Armies measures aimed at producing a change in that attitude were to be expected. This assumption was also supported by Badoglio's order. If such a change came about, not only would the German troops in the Italian jurisdiction be lost, but the elimination of the Italians, so favorably begun, would then be done.

impossible. The first crisis had arisen.

I became convinced that I now had to intervene personally. Late in the evening I received a report of a clash between German and Italian soldiers in a locality south of Durazzo, in which there were casualties. Then another report was received that in Tirana a German lieutenant had been shot dead in the street. At 23:00 a radiogram arrived from the battalion headed for Split, belonging to the 7th SS Mountain Division; it reported that the battalion had been prevented from continuing the march east of Split by several thousand partisans and that the Italian Division in the area of that city was making common cause with them. Shortly afterwards he reported that numerous new forces had joined the partisans and that the battalion was surrounded on all sides. Although the battalion, given the situation, needed rapid support, it was not possible that this would arrive before 3 to 6 days.

The 7th SS Mountain Division, which was in Bosnia, received the order to put in march on Split all the available forces, disengaging its jurisdiction as much as possible. Its most advanced parts, which had to march on foot, were 150 to 200 kilometers away from that city. The reinforced motorized infantry regiment was on the march towards Southern Serbia and from here it would be more than 1000 kilometers away from Split. The shortest, partisan-free road there led through Albania to the coast and then continued along it to the northwest. The coastal road was mostly only wide enough for one vehicle and had some extremely difficult stretches in the Albanian mountains, in Montenegro and Dalmatia. At that time we did not know its condition in detail. The regiment, the only mobile force available, was also to come to the battalion's aid. It was ordered to reach, for the time being, the Scutari area in Albania.

On the morning of the 10th the coast road was reconnoitered from the air to determine if at least the bridges, first of all the great bridge over the Naventa, were unscathed. When the plane reported in the affirmative, the regiment was to continue its march. There were very great objections to this march to be made by the regiment, a march of some 800 kilometers through the region occupied by the Italians, whose probable attitude was by no means clear, judging from the contradictory reports; but all these considerations had to be set aside. It seemed to me to go without saying that in this situation there could be no retreat. The command of the troops directed on Split was entrusted to the Commander of the 7th SS Division with the order to attack the Italian Division and the partisans, to beat them and to seize the city.

On September 9, when I received the report that the Italian Commander-in-Chief was trying to delay his reply to the invitation to surrender, I recognized the necessity of cancelling it as soon as possible in order to prevent his attempt, which was undoubtedly to be expected, to produce a change in the state of mind of the Italian troops. The reports I received afterwards on local difficulties reaffirmed my purpose.

At the Kraljevo airfield, located a short distance away, I had at my disposal a company of paratroopers of the Brandenburg Division with their planes. I resolved to fly myself the next day, on the morning of 10 September, with that company to Tirana and, if necessary, to take the Italian commander-in-chief prisoner and fly him out

98. *Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic*

of there.

Shortly after 07:00 when the last Ju-52 of the paratroopers disappeared behind the summit of a nearby mountain range, I took off accompanied by some officers of my command. It was a clear, bright sunny day, which promised to be very hot. We soon flew over the mountains of Southern Serbia, then the Albanian mountain ranges, with their rugged and romantic landscapes, with deeply embedded valleys and long ravines. I knew very well that the outcome of the flight was uncertain, as was my fate and that of my companions. It was as I flew into the uncertain, just as had been the journey of my battalions the day before, whose situation had not yet been clarified. I analyzed all the eventualities I had to reckon with in the realization of my purpose. When I subsequently reflected on the execution of this flight, I found that the consciousness of uncertainty, notwithstanding its magnitude, was not nearly so incisive and crushing as on previous occasions when I had been exposed to similar dangers. I had already been through many uncertain situations. Even though none was the same as another, I now realized that there is also a gradual adaptation to uncertainty.

After an hour and a half we were immediately in front of the Albanian coastal plain and near the foot of the mountain, the city of Tirana. The small airfield was immediately on the edge of the city. We could see how the last plane of the paratroopers had just landed and was on the edge of the runway. At the airfield I was introduced to the German Aviation General, who was the Luftwaffe liaison officer at Italian HQ. He was well aware of the circumstances in Tirana. In and around the city were an Infantry Division and several armored groups. The state of mind was covertly hostile, in some parts it was openly so; recently an Italian tank in a street in Tirana had pushed a German soldier against a house and broken him up. As for the Italian Commander-in-Chief, he was in the palace of ex-King Zogul, a one-story building, located in a small park inside the city.

The situation of the building and the airfield were favorable for the planned coup de main. I instructed the general, who knew in detail the local conditions of the palace, and the staff officer who had been in Tirana since the day before, with the company of paratroopers transported in the Luftwaffe covered trucks, to occupy the building by surprise, to take prisoner the Italian Commander-in-Chief and his chief of staff, to bring them to the airfield and in the Ju-52, ready for departure, to evacuate them by flight to Belgrade. I went with the officers to the Luftwaffe General's office located immediately in front of the Zogul palace and from where I could observe the arrival of the paratroopers. A quarter of an hour later I saw the two Italian generals, accompanied by two German officers, leaving the palace in two automobiles. Behind them followed the trucks of the paratroopers. Another quarter of an hour later, I received from the airfield the report that the machine had decolonized on its way to Belgrade.

Since our departure from Kraljevo I had every reason to be worried about future developments. In the past half hour, the tension had reached its culmination. It was reflected in the question that one of the officers accompanying me asked as we awaited the outcome of the General's mission: "Is it them or is it us prisoners?". Even if that question was intended as a joke and such was its tone, one could deduce from it the seriousness of the situation. I now had the conviction that with the elimination of the Italian Commander-in-Chief the most dangerous source of an Italian resistance with unity of conception had been removed. I cherished the hope of solving the local resistances. Thus in that morning parts of the Italian Division in and around Ragusa tried to offer open resistance and adopted a provocative attitude against the weak German troops in that area, which had left the vicinity of the Italians and established themselves in open ground. Still during the morning the Italians were induced to modify their conduct by the employment of a dive-bombing combat aviation group. The news that the Italian Commander-in-Chief had been taken prisoner spread through Tirana like wildfire and made a strong impression on the Italians. Rumor had also spread that the arrival of numerous German forces was imminent.

The reports of the units under Italian jurisdiction made it possible to recognize in The general feeling was that there continued to be a willingness to negotiate, although here and there a greater rigidity in the state of mind among the officers was noted. The disposition of the rank and file was described as "war-weary". Differences between officers and troops were also reported.

I had to try to reach a proper capitulation now and I invited after noon the Commander-in-Chief of the 9th Army, on whom the Italian units under my jurisdiction depended, to carry out the corresponding negotiations. He knew the state of mind of his units and was counting on the imminent arrival of strong German groupings and on the use of the Luftwaffe in case of an eventual resistance. On the basis of this situation he must have acquired the conviction that a resistance had no prospect of success and would only lead to useless bloodshed. During the negotiations I clearly saw in him the inner struggle that cost him the resolution of his sacrifice, although he was unquestionably convinced that he was doing it in the interest of his soldiers. I eased his situation by showing him chivalrous goodwill, as far as firmness permitted. And when a group of film newsreel photographers, who had arrived in the meantime, entered the negotiating room to film this historic episode, I expelled them. I did not have the vanity of appearing in the films of the "Weekly News" either on this or any other occasion. In the present case this caused me considerable reproaches from the supreme authorities.

Thus at 14:00 the capitulation document was signed at the Hotel Dajti in Tirana, by virtue of which the Italian troops in Dalmatia, Montenegro and Albania (about 270,000 men, among them 8,000 officers) surrendered their arms and became prisoners of the Germans. According to the law of nations, the commander-in-chief of an army is the person called upon to sign a capitulation. He may sign a capitulation by order or without order or even against the order of his government; its validity does not suffer thereby. According to the law of war in force, that capitulation governed the whole of the Italian troops under my jurisdiction. A violation of the clauses of the capitulation by the continuation of the fight or by other actions was contrary to the law of war and brought with it all the grave consequences foreseen for that case.

The Italian Division in Split, however, did not abide by the capitulation of its Commander-in-Chief and continued the fight. In the given circumstances, that fight could only be considered as a private war against Germany, contrary to the law of nations and the components of the Division had to be qualified as snipers. Equally contrary to the law of nations was the conduct of another Division which went into the mountains to join the partisans. Although it was attacked by the Luftwaffe, its march could not be prevented.

On September 11 an order from the Führer (all orders containing Hitler's personal dispositions were called "Führer's orders") arrived which stipulated that all officers of Italian units who after the capitulation presented resistance or went over to the partisans, when taken prisoner, were to be court-martialed and shot by snipers.

As the Italian units that proceeded in this way placed themselves outside the law of war and were, without the slightest doubt, snipers, this order, despite its harshness, had to be considered legal. That order arose from the indignation produced by the arbitrary and unlawful actions of some groups of Italians that originated considerable bloody losses in their own units and made the conduct of the war in an extremely critical situation dangerously difficult, in a way that could not yet be appreciated with exactitude. I resolved to act calmly. As the justice of the courts-martial was within the competence of the division commanders, I tried to influence them so that they would not proceed against all the officers taken prisoner in unlawful fighting, but only against the ringleaders of mutiny, who were proven guilty.

It would have been impossible to completely disregard the Führer's order out of consideration for the very troops who were fighting in front of Split and who had already suffered heavy casualties in dead and wounded because of the fighting contrary to the law of nations of the Italians and who had directly received this order. According to the law of war, all Italians included in the capitulation fell under German law. Even a German soldier would have had to expect the same treatment.

The battalion enclosed in front of Split repulsed several attacks in the following days. The march of the reinforcements, which were approaching, proceeded without friction. The poor road conditions caused the motorized regiment to advance only slowly. The road had stretches that could not be negotiated by drivers with a tendency to seasickness. An aviator who on the 13th and 14th was to scout the situation of the marching regiment, reported that his column was 70 kilometers long.

100. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

Meanwhile new units had arrived, transported to the other coastal areas. The Italians remained calm and surrendered their heavy weapons. The evacuation of the Italians proved difficult as the nearest railway station was 400 kilometers away. The railroad had to be reached by foot marches through partisan areas. For this reason, the Italians had to be left with their rifles and light machine guns until their embarkation at the station. This naturally constituted a certain danger. Only a few German officers with a few soldiers could be assigned to the prisoner columns to guard the march. The rationing was carried in trucks. The evacuation lasted more than a month. There was no friction anywhere.

On September 15 the motorized regiment and the first fractions of the forces from Bosnia arrived in the area near Split. The partisans who had learned of the approach of these troops disappeared on the morning of the 16th without a trace, abandoning their allies.

I answered an OKW question in the affirmative as to whether I could be free to report personally to Hitler at the Führer's headquarters. On the 16th I flew via Vienna to East Prussia. In the evening of that day I spoke for the second time with Hitler. In the antechamber of the conference hall I found several officers of the OKW General Staff waiting. I learned that Mussolini had just met Hitler in order to thank him for his release from captivity in Gran Sasso d'Italia. After some time the doors opened and Mussolini came out. He was wearing a gray civilian suit and gave the impression of being very serene. He greeted us with a friendly smile. I observed nothing of his familiar gestures and poses.

The external conditions of the study of the situation were the same as at the first time. At the beginning of the "afternoon situation", Hitler expressed to me his satisfaction at the rapid elimination of the danger threatening on the side of the Italians and pointed out the importance of this fact for the situation in the Balkans and for the conduct of the war as a whole. In his remarks, he allowed nothing to acknowledge the great tension which had dominated him as well as the whole OKW (as I later learned) in the days of uncertainty, but spoke as if it were a matter of course. He then expressed that he remembered the "brilliant successes of Orel" and handed me for that battle the oak leaves to the Knight's Cross. He spoke in a friendly conversational tone and in a natural, unassuming attitude. Yet a firm sense of authority emanated from his person. But I did not feel it, in any way, as an obstacle to the utterance of divergent thoughts and appreciations for it was evident that Hitler could not be privy to many details to the extent required, although not everyone knew how to draw from this the consequences. That his tendency to intervene when it caused harm was not counteracted is due in part to the

people around him. They should have tried it from the beginning. Later, when Hitler had acquired considerable experience and habit in the consideration of military questions and could point to the great successes of the resolutions he had taken, contrary to the advice of his collaborators called upon to advise him, this was, of course, no longer possible.

But that it was feasible to get Hitler to modify his inaccurate views I proved personally that night. The study of the situation began, as was now routine, with the eastern front. Hitler at that time assessed the events communicated by the commandos quite correctly, as far as I could judge. He gave various directives in connection with them. He then ordered some reports to be completed; these were details which, in my opinion, the Supreme Command was not supposed to deal with and which even I as an army commander would not have been concerned about. This should not have been anything abnormal since their dispositions were noted without qualms. He was then made to report on the status of preparations for an undertaking of some magnitude that had been planned in the southern sector. Various questions which arose were immediately settled by Hitler. Here, too, I found that the resolutions also dealt with questions which were of no concern to the Supreme Command.

He then moved on to the Balkans. Whereas up to then Hitler had spoken for almost the whole time, I now took the floor. I placed myself on Hitler's right and gave a broad outline of the development of the situation from the time of the separation from Italy until the morning of September 16. When I came in the narrative to express that my measures covered all the Italian units with the exception of a Division which was well to the north at Senj south of Fiume, against which I lacked forces and that this Division was going to try to break up

and reach Italy and that a part of its weapons was going to fall into the hands of the partisans, Hitler interrupted me, in a bad mood, with the words, "But, that is unpleasant. Something must be done there. I then told him that I did not have the strength for that purpose and did not see a solution. He replied: "Take a battalion of the regiment headed for Split and send it to Senj. From Fiume we will also send something there. (Addressing General Jodl) "What can we leave free in Fiume?" Jodl replied: "At present we have nothing available there". To which Hitler turned to me: "Then you must do it with your own forces". I understood his point of view that every effort should be made to take this division prisoner as well. I, too, had found it extremely difficult to give it up at the time. But I also realized that his intention was based on an insufficient knowledge of the details of the situation which, naturally, I could not have either. I replied: "Troops going to Senj would have to pass through an area especially well organized by the partisans, an area which up to now has been in the jurisdiction of the Italians and which for the most part has not been permanently occupied by them. No German soldier has so far set foot in it. It will be very difficult to conduct a march of weak forces through that region. To take out a battalion of the forces directed on Split would extremely endanger the action to be carried out there and would be at the same time too weak a force for Senj. It would also have to make a long and time-consuming detour through Croatia, and in any case it would be too late. Therefore, my Führer, I stand by my resolution."

During my presentation, there was continuous whispering and murmuring from those present, as usually happens when situations are being studied. When I finished speaking, there was a deathly silence. Hitler, who during my demonstrations was bending over the letter, slowly straightened up, looked at me for a few seconds with wide eyes and said in a muffled voice: "If you believe it. Then proceed as follows..." I then continued my exposition.

After studying the situation I remained for some time in the buffet. Here I met Jodl who said to me: "I thought that by talking like that, you were playing with your head". As I personally esteemed Jodl to a high degree, I only replied with a smile. I also knew that at that time nothing could be done against this way of thinking. This was indirectly confirmed to me some years later by an observation of Lieutenant Colonel von Weizenecker, who at the time in question was serving in the OKW and who later, I believe, was an aide to Colonel General Guderian. When in the autumn of 1945 in a prison camp I was telling a group of officers about my disagreement with Hitler, von Weizenecker interrupted me with the words: "I know that; I was present. I could see how they all turned pale".

When I returned to my headquarters, the evacuation of the Italians to the railroad had already begun and the forces sent to Split had made combat contact with the Italians who had occupied a position to the east of the city, a position in which there were also concrete defensive works. The fight in which also took part fighter planes in dive, lasted several days, until our forces, inferior in more than half to those of the adversary, managed to break the position and to force the capitulation. The capricious and senseless fighting of the Italians caused the Germans a loss of more than 500 killed and wounded and themselves probably not less. With the fall of Split the whole coast was now in our power. The first part of my mission had been accomplished.

The next task was to organize the defense of the coast. At that time I received the welcome news that another division was in transport for my army. I decided to direct it to Albania, not because of the partisans, who were only weakly represented in the extreme south, but for reasons of coastal defense.

3. Balkans

New information trips.

A large-scale operation against Tito is being prepared.

In order to gather a direct personal impression of the circumstances in the army area and to make contact with the commanders I flew first to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, where the command of an Infantry Division was then still located; from there I wanted to fly to Zara on the Dalmatian coast. On a beautiful day in the second half of September we flew westward over the high eastern mountain of Bosnia, which offers a wild and romantic panorama at the same time, like all the Balkan mountains, only a part of which are covered with dense forests, as they mostly leave bare rock uncovered. Deep valleys and winding ravines divide the mountains. Sarajevo lies in a mountain pot; its small airfield is close to a steep rock face.

I had been informed that in October I would have the Command of the V SS Mountain Corps and intended to assign to it as its jurisdiction the southeastern region of Croatia with Bosnia and a part of Montenegro. The Division would then be moved from the Sarajevo area and moved closer to the coast. Although I did not want to anticipate the plans of that Corps Command which I would conduct in the future in that area, there were many issues to discuss with the Division Commander; first of all the conduct of the fight against the partisans and the evacuation of the Italians. In the afternoon I visited the city, which I had last seen 30 years ago. The location is beautiful and unique. The houses of its suburbs rise along the steep slopes of the steep hills that approach from different directions a short distance from the city and are crowned by perfectly preserved old Turkish forts that are used as barracks. I also toured a large ancient cemetery that featured numerous tilted or fallen tombstones. Over many graves grew bushes and weeds. As the Mohammedan religion forbids the care of graves, a Turkish cemetery always gives the impression of abandonment and neglect. Moreover, it seems that the Turks, at least in past times, were in the habit of installing tombs outside the cemeteries, especially on the side of streets and roads. Thus I saw in different parts of the outskirts of the city many tombs damaged by time that appeared through the bushes that grow on the sides of the roads. Even in a small park in the middle of the city, two slanted tombstones announce that two Muslims have found their final resting place there, undisturbed until now.

The picture of the city is characterized by Turkish women wearing long black dresses and covering their faces with veils of the same color. The men wear the red fez as a head covering. Here the old customs are still severely preserved. Also the home of the poor Turks is extremely conservative. The wealthy Turks still maintain a harem in which, according to my recollection, four women are allowed. The clinging to the old, which is externalized in every detail of life, has induced, after Kemal-Baja's reforms in Turkey, many of the conservative Turks living in that country to send their children to Sarajevo to acquire a knowledge of life which answers to the wishes of the prophet, and which was carried in Turkey before these reforms of Kemal. The most interesting part of the city is grouped around the great mosque and the bazaar. Here one finds oneself in the middle of the Orient.

The next morning we took off in favorable weather for the flight to Zara. We were soon on our way to Zara. We were slowly climbing to reach the regulatory altitude of 1,000 meters above the highest point of the flight path when suddenly the horizon, in the direction we were following, seemed to be intercepted by a rocky wall. We were slowly climbing to reach the regulatory altitude of 1,000 meters above the highest point of the flight path when suddenly the horizon, in the direction we were going, seemed to be intercepted by a wall of dark gray clouds.

Shortly afterwards strong gusts made the machine unbalance continuously. It was evident that one of those unexpected dangerous storms, which cannot be announced in any meteorological report, was coming towards us. The pilot described an arc to return but, in the middle of the curve, the plane lost altitude very quickly in the

thin air of the storm currents; suddenly a vertical rock wall appeared to my right. The altimeter was already showing a drop of 800 meters when the three propellers of the airplane managed to find support in the denser air of the lower layers, so that the pilot again mastered the machine. We flew for a few minutes in a narrow, winding, rocky valley, the further shape of which we could not make out. The pilot, an experienced combat aviator, finally managed to bring the plane back over the mountains and with a tailwind and in the pouring rain we flew back to Sarajevo. In the attempt to land, the plane was twice thrown into the air by the headwind; it was only on the third attempt that we managed to land. We were glad to have solid ground under our feet again. The storm soon passed. The weather reports from Dalmatia were unfavorable. For this reason we returned to headquarters in the afternoon.

The Balkans is one of the most difficult regions for aviation. After its occupation in 1941 we lost many lives and aircraft. In spite of the experiences gathered, every month, on average, one aircraft was lost exclusively due to the unchecked forces of nature, which are triggered by unforeseen atmospheric circumstances. A few days before my arrival in the Balkans, the plane of the German air force commander in Croatia was destroyed during a storm on the side of a mountain.

The following weeks were spent in making numerous trips by car or plane, as I wanted to get to know as soon as possible the coast and the roads leading from it to the interior of the country, as well as the living and fighting conditions of the units.

In the last days of September I moved to Albania, choosing the westernmost of the two roads leading there. This road is the most beautiful for the panorama it offers and the most impressive; but in many sections it is also one of the most difficult in the Balkans. At first it runs through rocky ravines full of curves and for the most part it has been opened by blasting in the stone. Only a narrow strip of sky was visible. It reminded me of the *Gesaüse*, the romantic rift valley of the Enn in the Austrian Alps. Shortly before Mitrovitza, the southernmost town in Serbia, the valley widens into a wide plain. The locality was the site of a large smelter with several blast furnaces in which the lead ores obtained in the vicinity were processed.

The Mitrovitza plain continues into the plain of Northern Albania, which we reached after a short drive. The picture of the population changed abruptly. All the men now wore the white low fez and only the Mohammedan women wore the black veil covering their faces. I still have before me the image of a fat Albanian peasant woman sitting in an ox-drawn cart, who was frightened not so much by my automobile suddenly emerging after a curve as by having her face veil thrown back, which she hastily pulled in front of her face. From time to time a Turkish tomb, long since collapsed, was immediately visible on the roadside. Nothing is so melancholy as a Turkish tomb of this kind, built on a random spot on the ground and then left to itself, according to the command of the Prophet. A picture of unspeakable loneliness and abandonment.

As we approach Pristina, the northern Albanian city, we cross the famous Kosovo field, a vast, almost flat plain. Here in 1378 one of the battles that has often been called decisive in the history of the world was fought, in which Sultan Mamud V defeated the Serbian army. The Sultan's commander-in-chief met his death in this battle. Nor did the Sultan enjoy his victory for a long time, for when after the battle he received the Servian prince Duschan, the latter cut open his belly with a knife hidden in the shaft of his boot. The Sultan was buried in a magnificent mausoleum on the edge of the battlefield. In a circular hall is his sarcophagus, covered by a superb tapestry; towards his head is a turban. On the wooden frame of a window is a picture of the last order of the army given by the dying Sultan to his chiefs. An Albanian who spoke Italian translated it for me. I remember the phrase worthy of note: "Never tolerate robbery, plunder and rape in the conquered countries. They are the greatest danger to the discipline of the army".

The sarcophagus of Mamud's commander-in-chief is in a small, unremarkable mausoleum in the middle of the old battlefield. I stood for a long time in front of the old Turkish tombstones, leaning or crumbling, that surround the small dome-shaped construction and gazed out over the wide Kosovo plain on which the battle

had been fought. It must have responded almost obligatorily to the tactic of the Middle Ages that this flat area between the Serbian and Albanian mountains was chosen as the scene of the fighting.

I had to remember that this battle not only sealed the fate of Serbia for centuries, but also that it is linked to a far-reaching historical process: the power of the Turks reached the borders of Central Europe. This, in turn, prompted me to reflect on the role of a battle in history. Before appreciating it, we must determine whether it has originated a historical development that would not be conceivable without it or whether it is only an episode in the course of a great process, an episode whose success or failure would merely accelerate or slow down that process. The victory of the Greeks at Marathon and Salamis were decisive events in the future shaping of the world. The much-mentioned victory of England over the Spanish navy in 1538 did not decide England's path to world power, for this was already predetermined by the intrinsic conditions of England and the situation of the world. The victory in the Channel only furthered that development and was one of its episodes. A defeat in a single battle would never have permanently closed this path, but could at most have slowed down the process, just as the defeat of Spain could not have initiated the definitive decline of this State if it had not already been prepared by its internal evolution. There are only a few decisive battles in world history in the sense expressed above.

In the great peoples, lost wars have never led to a permanent loss of power or to collapse, unless the defeat was also the consequence of the decline of the moral strength of the people. The loss of a war was then only the expression of the unfavorable conjunction of situations and events, or of the deficiency of the organization and leadership of that people. Its influence would be only transitory. I am thinking of France in 1815 and 1871, of Prussia in 1806, of Austria in 1805 and 1809, of Russia in 1856 and of Germany in 1918. In Kosovo, Serbia lost its political independence for four and a half centuries, even though the strength of its people remained intact. This is explained by the considerable superiority of the Turkish power over the small Servian people; the great duration of that power, even though it had long been undermined, must be attributed solely to the jealousies and rivalries of the great European powers.

I decided to spend the night in Pristina; the most difficult part of the trip was still ahead of us. The small sober country town offers nothing worth visiting. Even the small mosque fails to give it the oriental tinge that I have found in all other Albanian cities. Pristina is the center of Albanian silversmiths and silver filigree artisans, who make beautiful works. Here the road divides, the one heading southeast leads to the city of Skopje. The next day we continue in a southerly direction to Prizren. This purely Turkish town has a completely oriental character. We saw many old Turkish houses with protruding windows, provided with a dense wooden trellis, or houses whose walls have no openings to the street, having only windows to a courtyard. The great mosque, with signs of the action of time, and an old Turkish fortress already in ruins, on the slope of the mountain range approaching the city, complete the romantic picture. On the southern edge of the town is the road to the very large field of a Turkish cemetery. For 500 years, burials have been made there.

We soon reached a very inhospitable mountainous region until the small town of Kukesch, where we reached the valley of the Drin, which comes from the high mountains of Albania and flows south of Scutari into the Adriatic Sea. As it mostly runs through a rocky gorge that often does not even leave room for a goat path, the road was laid out across the mountains. This extremely daring road construction must have demanded an enormous deployment of labor and material and is a brilliant demonstration of the road capacity of the Italians. The difficulty of its construction and its use, as well as the ease of its interception, can be deduced from the fact that in the heart of the mountain, in a stretch of 60 kilometers in a straight line, 1,200 serpentines and curves of less than 90°. Here it was a matter of crossing three mountain ranges perpendicular to the direction of travel, separated from each other by deep valleys with steep slopes. Twice the road descends hundreds of meters to the valley floor and twice it climbs again to the same height to the mountain ridge. Then, its route over several ridges presents many works of art and when before reaching the Scutari plain it descends to the Drin valley, in some stretches its route has been opened in the rock walls.

The vegetation on the plain has abruptly taken on a southern character. From afar the minarets of Scutari could be seen. A visit to the city was not on the program for that day. I met the commander of the only Division we had so far in Albania, in a group of houses right next to the road. At that time he had his units in the most important localities of Albania. After the arrival of the new division which was advancing through Skoplje, its area would be limited to the northern half of the country. At that time everyone was intensively engaged in the reconnaissance of the coast as regards conditions for landing and defense. The construction of the most important works had already begun.

The trip continued south along the very good concrete road, also built by the Italians, through the coastal plain that here is about 15 kilometers wide. To our left we were accompanied by a range of rocky mountains that only in some stretches had sparse vegetation. Up to the north of Durazzo the coast is mostly marshy and does not enter into consideration for a landing of relatively large forces. In the rigor of the summer it is certain that numerous marshes dry up. We pass through Alessio, which, perched on a rocky ridge, lies on the banks of the Drin, presenting an extraordinarily picturesque aspect. The Drin forms a large lagoon to the west of the town before it flows into the sea. This is a very unhealthy area because of malaria. Shortly after, from the half-slope of a steep wall, on our left, we are greeted by the Krujë scree where the ruins of the castle of Scanderberg, Albania's national hero, still stand. In the afternoon we arrived in Tirana, the capital of Albania, the goal of the day. The trip made until then allowed me to gather a clear

The most important points of the coastline were reached by paths that started from the road.

The Italians have built excellent new roads in Albania, or improved the existing ones. Their construction activity was almost exclusively limited to the area of Tirana. At the edge of the city, on three sides of an excessively large square, very well kept, they have erected the monumental government building and the large Dajti hotel, which would also do well in Nice or Monte Carlo. These buildings are immediately followed by a group of often charming houses, each surrounded by a garden. The houses on the two main streets, almost all one-story houses in the old part of town, show the lack of style of the second half of the 19th century. The streets do not impress as either European or Oriental and produce that indefinable impression that is especially picked up in the western part of the east, when the east fails to incorporate European forms into its life. In the suburbs where the population lives in their primitive constructions, one feels as if one has been transported to the Orient. On the edge of the city, the Italians have built several barracks. Although they come from a very recent epoch, their facilities and the Division of the space were very deficient, to such an extent that I would not have assigned them to our units in time of peace.

The XXI Mountain Corps Command was in Tirana. The main topic of the meeting with its commander was the organization of the coastal defense and the distribution of forces after the arrival of the new Division. Although up to then he could only appreciate the circumstances on the basis of the chart, he had already noticed that the choice of the coast as the main line of battle in the defense of the Balkans could not present almost no prospect of success because of the smallness of the own forces; on the other hand, even weak forces would not find it difficult to prevent an adversary from penetrating into the mountain, for the most part impassable and whose main ridges run parallel to the coast. The mountains only in a few places come within a short distance of the coast; for the most part they are 15 to 20 kilometers away from it. In this kind of defense, the abandonment of the Albanian coastal plain and the flat area of Dalmatia had to be borne, which undoubtedly had great disadvantages, but which were amply compensated by the firmness of the defense. It was a matter of course that the coast should also be organized for defense, because small landing attempts had to be repulsed and, in addition, in the defense of the mountain, the coast had to play the role of the advance camp.

The Mountain Corps Command also informed me that the population was calm and well disposed towards us and was happy to have been liberated from the Italians. There were also indications of the gradual infiltration of partisans from Greece into the southern border region of the country. The mission of the corps commander to induce the Albanian ruling classes to form a government and to take over the administration of the country

clashed with a retentive attitude. For this purpose he had addressed in the first place the representatives of the old nobility, those who lived in the countryside, most of them being large landowners who enjoyed great sympathy among the people. The old noble families traced their ancestry, as a rule, from the previous prince of the lineage and some still used this noble title.

I was invited to eat at the German Consul General, Mr. Schliep, who had a very well appointed house, which seemed to us like a German oasis in this exotic country. A number of Albanian personalities had been invited. They came in tails and white ties, their ladies in evening dresses. All of them had spent several years abroad for study or educational purposes, whether in Vienna, Rome or London. In addition to Albanian, they spoke the language of the country where they had studied. In spontaneous conversation, after the meal with some Albanians, I touched the

problem of the form of a government. I could tell that they were afraid of compromising themselves vis-à-vis Great Britain, a country which by political tradition was close to them, if they took part in a government, and that this might prove disadvantageous to them when normal circumstances again came into existence. From the conversation they must have gathered, in any case, the clear impression that a military government such as the one we would soon be forced to organize, even if it proceeded with all justice and correctness, could never represent and defend the interests of Albania, as an Albanian government with full corresponding powers.

We then move on to speak of Albania's past, in which the figure of Scanderberg stands out in a very captivating way. It is remarkable how the great deeds of men of action continue to live in the memory of the peoples and how they are a permanent source of energy, from which the peoples receive new impulses and through which they rise again in misfortune. Scanderberg represents for the Albanians the preservation of the thought of national independence. He must have been a man of powerful energy and of great military aptitudes, that in spite of being young when he had to leave his country he maintained firm and imperturbable his national feeling. When the Turks, after the battle of Kosovo, also occupied Albania, the Albanian princes had to send their sons as hostages to the Sultan's court. For this reason, the young Scanderberg, of the lineage of the Castrioda, who was born in 1404 in Kroja, arrived at the court of Murad II, in Adrianople. He was outwardly Mohammedan and enjoyed the special favor of the Sultan. In 1442 he accompanied the Turkish army led against the Hungarian king, Hunyadi. When the Turkish army was defeated, he fled with some loyalists to Albania, made contact with the princes of the old tribes and expelled the Turkish garrison. Three times Scanderberg defeated the Turkish army, until finally the Sultan was forced to recognize the sovereignty of Albania.

After Scanderberg's death, internal rivalries arose and were exploited by Turkey, and Albania was once again subjected to its domination. Scanderberg is also remembered by the Albanians as he inspired their simple folk songs and continually stimulated popular fantasy.

The goal of the next day's trip was Wallonia, in the far south of the country. Already at dawn the heat was intense. We first headed for Durazzo, the real port of Albania. The landing possibilities are quite favorable to the north as well as far south of the city. A wide pier of solid construction separates a part of the wide harbor from the sea. Around Durazzo one of the centers of gravity of the defense was formed, for which the circumstances were very favorable. The small town, the ancient Dirrachium, played an important role in the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. Here in the late autumn of 49 B.C., Caesar besieged Pompey, who had twice as many forces at his disposal. Caesar was beaten in a sortie of Pompey and retreated to Epirus. This was perhaps Caesar's greatest defeat, for which he found these words: "The war would have been won by the enemies if they had had one who knew how to win".

On the hill between the sea and the city is the summer palace of the former king Zogul. It is a small massive building with beautiful views to the west over the boundless expanse of the Adriatic Sea and to the east over the high mountains of Albania.

The trip continued about 10 kilometers from the seashore; there the coast up to Valona is very marshy. We passed large rivers, such as the Skumbi and Semeni, over long concrete bridges and arrived at the small town of

Fieri, built on a blade of land and apparently free of the malaria that dominates the entire coastal region. From this blade there is a wide view over the coastal area. On the southern slope of the blade there are numerous remains of the Roman period, among which are a miniature theater, as there must not be another of this smallness, several very thin columns, which partly remain erect from a temple also very small, as well as the main walls of some houses. In the proximities there is a village whose houses are entirely built of Roman stones. On all the walls there were stones with Greek and Latin inscriptions. In the paved courtyard of one house a stone had been placed on which a Greek text 20 lines long had been chiseled. It is probable that no archaeologist has yet read it.

The explanation for these memories of Roman times that are so crowded here is that in the plain between Fieri and the sea was located the flourishing Roman city of Apollonia, which had to be abandoned by the Romans because malaria, increasingly intense, made life there impossible. This catastrophic development was due to a landslide that closed the course of the Vojusa, which at that time flowed through the Fieri plain and has since flowed some 10 kilometers further south. Because of this, the drainage of the plain was impeded and the small streams coming from the east formed swamps that became breeding grounds for malaria mosquitoes, which no longer allowed life in the city. Apollonia also had a university where Octavian, later Emperor Augustus, studied. Here he was also reached by the news of the assassination of his uncle Caesar. The city lies under mud, rushes and humus, and no archaeologist's shovel has yet searched for hidden traces of life in another age. Perhaps new elements of study about ancient life would be found here.

Shortly after Fieri, we reached the fatal Vojusa River. Here, too, thoughts turned to Julius Caesar. On the bank of this river, during the civil war, he set up a camp whose location has not yet been determined. Wanting to cross from the mouth of then to the city of Brundisium (Brindisi), located on the other side of the Adriatic, in order to personally accelerate the arrival of reserves, the boatman showed concern about the imminence of a storm. Caesar reassured him with the words that have become famous: "Do not be afraid; you lead Caesar and his fate".

Shortly before reaching Valona we crossed a hill of olive trees. The heat was crushing and in the shade of this unique forest it seemed to be even hotter. The mountains, almost all of them rocky, now reached the immediate vicinity of the road. We crossed the small town and immediately found ourselves in front of the port. This huge harbor, which penetrates about 15 kilometers inland and has a width of about 10 kilometers, can undoubtedly accommodate the largest fleet. In the south it is enclosed by the Karaburun peninsula, along which runs the summit of a rocky mountain range; in the east, the steep rocky mountain only leaves room for the road along the coast and in the north, there is a shallow lake attached to the sea. In front of the entrance to the harbor bay, there is the island of Saseno, which emerges steeply, constituting two rock cones; on the island the Italians left two batteries of 15 cm cannons. The port has no landing facilities, such as a pier or dock. An attack from the sea against the region of Valona would be a difficult enterprise whatever the direction from which it is carried out.

Never before had I felt the heat as hard to bear as I did that day. Sweat was pouring down our bodies. In the city we found the explanation: the thermometer read 67° C in the sun and 41° C in the shade. In the afternoon we flew directly without stopover to headquarters.

The elimination of the Italian army in my zone had originated a great number of movements of the German units, which continued for several weeks and were due to the changes of devices imposed by the occupation of new regions and of the coast. During this period, the intention of carrying out large undertakings against the partisans had to pass to a second or third place. This did not prevent us from continually dealing with this problem. Its difficulty lay in the fact that the location of important partisan forces was a very uncertain matter.

Once this was achieved, the units had to be brought without attracting the attention of the partisans to a situation from which a concentric advance could be made against them. Also this advance had to remain as long as possible hidden, otherwise the partisans, thanks to their excellent scouting service, would prematurely evade

the blow. At the beginning of October we had ascertained the presence of important forces in the mountains in the Jajce-Travnik area, west of Sarajevo, and in Western Croatia, west of Bihac. At that time the situation of our troops was very unfavorable for an undertaking in Western Croatia.

My command was working precisely on the bases and preparations for an enterprise in the Jajce-Travnik area, when we received reports on partisan movements which made it possible to make very interesting deductions. We must advance that the British abundantly provided Tito with wireless materials. His Corps, Divisions and independent Brigades possessed radiotelegraphic stations. Many of Tito's orders and group communications were transmitted by radio. The texts were encrypted; the code was changed frequently. Shortly after my arrival in the Balkans, the army's wireless listening service managed to discover the partisans' code. When the key was changed, it took about thirty texts to discover the new one. The radiotelegraphic location service was also in a position to locate in some cases the points where the radio stations were located; but the disturbances by terrestrial magnetism were usually so great that a location was not always possible. In any case, the army was continuously informed of the radiograms of the partisans and received in this way, together with the occasional localizations, the most valuable information. Even if the conduction by radio of groupings distributed over a great extension was an enormous simplification for Tito, in the last analysis the donation of the English had to turn out to be for him a real gift of Danae.

A careful examination of the radiotelegraphic listening of the last days made it possible to recognize the movement of various partisan groups from the western regions of Croatia in an easterly direction. Some groups disappeared for several days from the radiotelegraphic picture; some of them were called unsuccessfully even by Tito's radiotelegraphic station. There was something mysterious about the events that remained unclear for a long time. They were carefully observed. Even when we knew the way in which the partisans carried out changes of accommodation, the statements of some prisoners were very enlightening. When they were confronted by local people, it was established that they were not from the area; they then admitted that their unit was on the move. They were able to express in general what the objective of the last day was, but not the final objective, which seemed plausible. As to the conduct of the march, they said that during the day they kept themselves hidden, distributed in the woods, and that they only marched at night, in groups, almost always off the roads. Everywhere they found guides very knowledgeable about the region who were also informed about the lodgings and customs of the German units there. They were also occasionally provided with food.

I ordered the Division in which the interrogations of these prisoners had been carried out, that the movements of the partisans were not to be disturbed either by an intensification of the exploration or by companies. The strictest silence was also to be maintained about everything. At first I suspected the intention of a large undertaking against Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, whose garrison had been greatly weakened, as several units were moved to the coastal area. The army directed several detachments to that city, in small groups, so as not to attract attention.

Soon the radiotelegraphic picture offered quite precise elements of judgment to deduce that the area of gathering of the partisans was the region of the Korun and Javor plateaus. This region is about 40 to 50 kilometers north and northwest of Sarajevo. It is an inhospitable mountainous region, very cracked, mostly covered with extensive forests. There were only a few small villages there. The partisans had so far neglected that region; it had hardly been

by German units. This area had been well chosen for the assembly of numerous partisan forces. But it was apparently not suitable as a starting point for an enterprise against Sarajevo; another assembly area then followed to the south of the previous one and was situated to the east of Sarajevo. The latter area had always been heavily occupied by partisans and had only very few small villages.

In any case, it was already necessary to begin preparations to encircle the partisans after their meeting, in order to beat them, whatever their purpose. It was a case of extraordinary luck that these forces, so difficult to take, created themselves the favorable opportunity to strike a blow. The German units situated in the localities of a vast circle were now to be reinforced without attracting attention, and new units were to be brought into

localities hitherto unguarded, but favorably situated for this enterprise, considerably reducing the forces in other regions. One difficulty presented itself, for the time being, only on the eastern front bordering on Serbia, where there were no troops at my disposal. The forces in this country depended on the military commander of Serbia, who was not under my command and consisted only of security units. He had a certain right to dispose of some Bulgarian Divisions which were in Eastern Serbia.

Soon the great conundrum as to what purpose Tito had in view with the gathering of substantial forces in Eastern Bosnia was resolved. Clarification was obtained from different sources, among them two written orders from Tito captured in the first week of November. One of them dated November 4, was addressed to the "Croatian Main Command", which was ordered to put six Divisions to Serbia. It went on to say: "You (i.e. the addressee) cannot possibly understand that Serbia is now the most important thing and that the problem of the state organization of the Yugoslav Government in exile in London, and especially that of the king, must be solved there. All local interests must be subordinated to this problem". Further clarification was provided by the order of November 5, also issued to the Main Command, in which Tito speaks of the attempts of the Government of emigrants and of the king, who deceitfully took advantage of the agreement reached in Moscow and tried to return to the country.

In Serbia was General Mihajlovic with his tschetniks; he was the Minister of War of the Serbian government in exile. Tito's supporters and communists in Serbia were few in number, had few weapons and were kept crushed by their mortal enemies, the tschetniks. Tito counted on an installation of the government in exile, perhaps also of the king, in the jurisdiction of the Tschetniks in Serbia and saw in it a strengthening of the influences detrimental to his political position. It was undoubtedly an important motive for him to promote energetically the communist movement in Serbia by means of the displacement of forces to that country, with the purpose of preventing the realization of the intentions of the government in exile.

That was not the only reason for the projected enterprise. Another must have been that his forces were already too numerous for a partisan movement; it was becoming increasingly difficult for them to be properly equipped and supplied. Tito, like the commanders of his large units, never engaged in an open fight against German troops, except in the cases in which he was forced to do so, and even less did he carry out offensive actions of a certain magnitude, but only carried out a fight of small hand strikes and assaults; for that form of combat much less numerous forces would have been sufficient for him; with them he would have achieved the same result. The most sensitive part of Tito resided precisely in his large troops.

It was obvious that the break towards Serbia had to be prevented, not to support the government in exile, but to prevent an expansion of the partisan movement in that country. It was also necessary to

to take advantage of the first opportunity that had so far presented itself to have numerous partisan forces gathered in a relatively small space to strike a blow.

The concentration itself was carried out in five large groupings; at first, in a wide circle around Eastern Bosnia. Its purpose had to be absolutely masked if it was not to fail. The approach marches were alternated with retrograde marches and marches in other directions than to the definite points of destination until ending up concentrating decisively at the moment at those points. The motorized units were retained until the last moment far away from the whole zone. These movements were carried out in parallel with the gathering of the partisans that continued developing; they did not call the attention of these last ones since until recently, as sequel of the separation of the Italians, numerous movements of the German units had been carried out. The movements of German troops, communicated to Tito by some partisan groupings, could not give him an orientation of the purpose of the general movement, even with a rigorous examination of the information at his disposal.

On the eastern front in Bosnia, Servian police and security forces were to intercept the Drina from Zvornik upstream; the great arc of the Drina on both sides of Rogatica, against which the main effort was most likely expected, was to be occupied by the 1st Mountain Division, placed temporarily by the OKW at my disposal,

whose arrival in Serbia had been promised for November.

The enterprise against the partisans in Eastern Bosnia was taking on the character of a large-scale operation. When I assumed command over the Western Balkans, I would not have imagined that such a large-scale operation could be achieved here. In view of the slowness of the extremely cautious movements of the partisans, it was to be expected that the situation would only reach its decisive phase after a few weeks. I thus had time to continue the reconnaissance of my zone before the arrival of winter.

First I flew to Sarajevo, where the 5th SS Mountain Corps Command had arrived in October. It had been assigned the southeastern part of Croatia, south of the Save, and Bosnia as its area. The Corps had an important part in the execution of the offensive. I studied with the commanding general all the required details.

He also informed me that that morning, in accordance with my orders, he had had a Croatian newspaper seized which incited the population to proceed against the Pravo Slavs. Just on that day a report was also received that a group of the Ustacha had arrested 20 Pravo Slav workers from a sawmill east of Sarajevo and had taken them away. I ordered to demand the release and return of these workers and instructed the general to enforce my demand by force in case of refusal. The matter was settled in a very short time in the desired manner. I am sure that these workers would never have returned had it not been for this attitude. In this way, hatred and acts of persecution against the Pravo-Slavs always arose anew.

Following that visit, I took advantage of the favorable weather to fly to Zara, where I had not yet gone after my unsuccessful flight attempt in September. The mountains of Western Bosnia and later the Dinaric Alps belong to the most rugged mountains of the Balkans. Often as far as the eye could see nothing but bare rocky elevations presenting the most capricious shapes, again following dark regions of extensive forests. Deep, shadowy ravines marked the course of the various streams. The panorama from the air gives only a faint impression of the ruggedness and fierceness of these regions, which remained well engraved in my memory of my travels thirty years before. After flying over the edge of the mountains of the Dinaric Alps, which drops steeply, we had below us the plain of the Dinaric Alps.

We descended almost 3,000 meters to land on the large airfield east of Zara. We descended almost 3,000 meters to land at the large airfield east of Zara. Between the airfield and the town rises a low rocky mountain, on which the Italians had built command posts and batteries, in the form of caverns, and fighting positions by blasting into the stone and numerous concrete works inland. What was appropriate from these works was included in the constructions for the defense of the coast.

From that mountain there was a good view of Zara, located a short distance away. The difficult part of that picture was that the whole city was a single pile of rubble, in which there was not a single unscathed building. Still during the period of occupation by the Italians it had been the victim of a British air raid. We tried in vain to find a reason for such destruction.

The city proper stands on a small island separated from the land by an arm of the sea in the form of a canal. In the city some stretches of streets had been cleared in order to allow traffic to the defense works built on the seashore by our units. We passed by the remains of a once famous garden; amidst the rubble, plants and trees grow with southern splendor even when the autumn wind was already blowing. To reach the ancient Roman cathedral, we had to crawl over piles of rubble formed by collapsed multi-story houses. This famous church was also largely destroyed. Only here and there a "campanile" could be seen intact; I also saw a column of a Roman temple that had been spared by the bombs.

Without military necessity, a city rich in monuments of an eventful past and selected works of southern art had been destroyed, making it a center of culture, attractive and unique, with a history of more than two thousand years. As I found myself in the midst of this desolation, there flashed before my memory the pictures of the then harbor and of the busy, bustling life in the narrow alleys of the city that I had known in my previous

travels; probably nowhere in the world is such lively activity going on in so narrow a space as in the coastal cities populated by Italians. The remnants of the population had retreated to the most inconceivable lodgings on the outskirts of the city. On the return flight, again a stopover had to be made in Sarajevo.

4. Balkans ***New reconnaissance in Albania and Montenegro.*** ***Large-scale action against Tito.***

The wireless traffic of the partisans during those days had only brought confirmation that their enterprise was in full swing. I could therefore continue my reconnaissance and wanted now to visit the southern part of Montenegro and Dalmatia. I was to travel through Albania and used this time the eastern of the two roads leading to that country. It is somewhat longer, but not as difficult to travel as the other. As far as Pristina we followed the well-known route through the valley of the Ibar, then we turned southeast and passed through Macedonia, which produces the famous tobacco, but which at the same time, since the last century, has been one of the intense hotbeds of unrest in the Balkans. This fiercely contested region is populated by Macedonians, Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks and at that time had been assigned to Bulgaria. We soon reached the plain of Skoplje, the Turkish Üsküb, the capital of that geographical region. The city rises on both banks of the Vardar, which is already an important watercourse here. It was the headquarters of the 1st Bulgarian Army, to whose commander-in-chief I paid a visit. His area reached as far as Ohrid on the Albanian border. There was something to discuss with him, because we wanted to use the road and railroad crossing his area to supply the new units in southern Albania.

The next day we reached Bistolj, the second most important town in Macedonia, which stands in a most picturesque spot and still possessed a particularly Turkish aspect, which Skoplje had already lost. The good wide road follows for a stretch the Vardar, which runs through a deeply recessed bed and then comes out into an unpopulated mountainous region, of an astonishing remoteness from the world, which presents few rocks, many bushes and shady forests. After a relatively long journey we were suddenly presented with Ohrid, the pretty little town and the vast Ohridsee Lake. This lake, surrounded by steep rocky mountains, reminded me very much of Lake Traun in Upper Austria, only the former is incomparably larger. About 20 kilometers to the south is the ancient Ohrid convent on the shore of the lake, one of the most famous and historically interesting of the Balkan convents. Unfortunately, the time available did not allow me to visit it.

We were here on a particularly hotly contested ground. For the Bulgarians and Albanians, the Lake Ohridsee region is also a religious sanctuary. From the Ohrid convent had come the monks who converted the Bulgarians and Albanians to Christianity. The convent also possesses valuable documents relating to the earliest history of both peoples. The population of Albanian origin was in minority; but I have found that the ideological aspect is defended in the fight with even more fanaticism than the ethnographic one. It is for this reason that in regions disputed in this way, even a plebiscite held to ascertain opinion does not provide a solution that satisfies all participants.

Shortly after Ohrid we set foot on Albanian soil. Little did I suspect that the most beautiful stretch of the journey was the one we had yet to make. Before long a valley opened up more and more enchanting and grandiose, until finally it took on the aspect of an enormous canyon, whose stone walls rising almost vertically, often left room only for the open path in the living rock and the fast-flowing stream that roared down there. Not a person was to be seen, nor any other living thing, except occasionally a circling bird of prey. Thus it was followed almost always straight northward, for hours on end, through this

majestic landscape whose wild grandeur was gradually beginning to overwhelm. Even beauty can be tiring. Suddenly the stone wall on the left, southern, ended, as if it had been cut off at the root, without any transition, and a wide plain stretched out in front and to the left of us. Soon after we passed by an old Turkish cemetery and had the town of Elbasan in front of us. Also the journey along that road provided decisive impressions for considerations on the defense of the Western Balkans.

Elbasan is, after Scutari and Tirana, the largest city in Albania and is one of the oldest towns. It presents an almost entirely Turkish character. Its former importance, being situated at one end of the old road linking Albania and Macedonia, has been greatly lost in the present automobile age. I was informed by the commander of the Division which had charge of the defense of Southern Albania, of the work in progress. I then saw a heavy shore battery of the Navy resting on the edge of the town, where it had arrived a few hours before us; it was destined for Durazzo. Four of the heaviest tractors were pulling special six-wheeled trailers, on which the tubes, weighing about 30 tons, had been loaded; then there were special vehicles for gun carriages, platforms and winches, and a large baggage of trucks for service, ammunition, workshops, food, etc. The drivers, especially those of the heavy tractors, had performed a beautiful feat in traversing the ravine road.

From Elbasan two roads led to Tirana; one went to the coastal plain, describing a wide arc through Durazzo; the other had been laid out directly on the narrow rocky summit that extends from here to the vicinity of Tirana. I chose the path along the summit which, from a technical point of view, is one of the most interesting works of the Italian art of road construction. It almost always follows the summit of the mountainous back that reaches the vicinity of Tirana. The trip was a singular excursion by car along the crest of a mountain; on the left, the view reaches deep into the Albanian plain and as far as the sea; on the right, on the other side of a narrow valley, is the formidable stony massif of the high Albanian mountain. From the military point of view, the road was valuable for the communication between the north and the south of Albania, because it did not pass close to the dangerous coast, like the road through Durazzo.

The next day we continued to Scutari and there we turned west towards the coast. We wanted to reach the small port of Ulcinj first. We crossed a karst region, whose cultivated land had the characteristic appearance of the entire coastal area up to Trieste: numerous small and very small plots of land, surrounded by fences of about one meter high, formed by stones and slabs collected from the land and placed in the form of a rudimentary wall. In this way the stones occupy a small space and, at the same time, form a protection of the land and crops against the goats, which are a danger to any plantation and that together with the donkeys are the main domestic animals. We then followed a secondary road that was barely the width of a vehicle, and through the rocks of the coast, in endless curves, descended to the edge of cliffs down to sea level. The road required a driver absolutely free of motion sickness. The small town, literally clinging to the steep slope, had been badly damaged by aviators. On a rocky elevation jutting into the sea were the ruins of an old Turkish castle. The picture of the small village, the gray rocks, the ruined castle, the dark blue sea and the indefatigable seagulls was picturesque. Here, too, work on the defense works was progressing at a good pace. Some large caves built centuries ago by the Turks could also be used.

We were glad when on the way back we left our road behind us among the rocks. Shortly after we reached Vár, which used to be called Antivari and was the only port in Montenegro. This

place had a relatively strong garrison because a part of the shore is gently sloping and wooded, offering fewer difficulties to a landing and because the depression that from here leads to Scutari constitutes a remarkable invasion door. Then again followed an impassable coast, full of large rocks. There were also stretches that caused dizziness, with deep slopes falling into the sea on the left and steep mountains on the right. But there were also stretches where humus had formed, so that foliage trees and shrubs could grow. In one place we were enchanted by the view, down there, of a small island close to the coast, where there is a monastery and some houses and which is connected to the mainland by a rocky strip the width of a road: it was San Stefano, an island that could be called the Monte San Michele of the Adriatic.

Then we arrive at Budua, a charming and ancient port city. It has been built on a small tongue of land with the maximum use of space and is separated from the land by a perfectly preserved Venetian fortress wall. A Venetian castle, at the tip of the tongue, dominates the small port. Many picturesque ruins, very narrow alleys and the construction of the houses give this town a distinctly Italian appearance. A gently sloping beach, several kilometers long and roads leading to Cetinje and Cattaro made this area also of military importance to us.

For the continuation of the trip I chose the road to Cetinje, the capital of Montenegro, located at 1,300 meters

above sea level. We had already reached a considerable height when suddenly the mountains were enveloped by gray-black clouds and soon after a torrential rain poured down, so dense that we could not see ten paces. The windshield wipers did not work and we had to stop frequently. In many places the water fell from the stone walls like a torrent on the roof of the vehicle. On two occasions we found large boulders in the middle of the road, fallen from above, blocking the road. With everyone's effort we managed to carry them to the edge of the road and throw them to the bottom of the ravines. It was even worse when the rain was followed by a fog so thick that it prevented us from seeing anything. All that remained was to stop and wait. The trip along very bold serpentines on the edge of cliffs and in that weather had all the makings of a memorable one.

When we reached the summit, the sun appeared again. On this trip, the great difficulties presented by the roads leading inland from the coast once again became apparent.

As far as the eye could see, the mountains and hills were all bare rock. Only in the few low places where soil had accumulated, there was cultivated land. Cetinje impressed as an oasis in this inhospitable region. It is a small town, judiciously and tastefully planned, which also possesses some fine buildings from the time of the monarchy. The last and most important of the kings of Montenegro was Nicholas who caused many hours of unrest to the European cabinets. Before the World War I, conflicting interests clashed in Cetinje. Money flowed there from St. Petersburg, as well as from Vienna and Rome. Montenegro always found great support in the big Slavic brother Russia as well as in Italy, whose queen was a daughter of Nikita. I remember the great uproar in Europe, in my time as a lieutenant, when Nikita declared that Montenegro could not live without the fertile plain of Scutari, which belonged to Albania, and when he made all the preparations to take it away from the Albanians. A grouping of forces made up of contingents from various powers had to be sent. On the northwestern border of Montenegro there were frequent incidents with the Austro-Hungarian border guards. Nikita knew how to keep Europe in suspense. The frequently empty state coffers were in a cause-and-effect relationship with these attitudes. He ruled the country with a patriarchal regime.

The partisan movement had begun to spread also to the northern part of Montenegro. Tito was then about to create a brigade there. For the time being we lacked forces to move them to this region of difficult access and poor roads. In the south of the country there was complete tranquility. The administration of Montenegro was in charge of commissions of a Provisional National Assembly.

We continued our journey on a good, gently sloping, uphill road that crossed a wide depression that looked like a sea of rocks. The poverty of the country cannot be overcome. Only now and then could a solitary dwelling built of stone blocks be seen. After an hour's drive, we reached the height of the Lovtschen, a rock massif of 1,703 meters elevation, the north side of which drops almost vertically into the bay of Cattaro. And yet, down this sheer wall a road descends to Cattaro; it is the most beautiful and daring mountain road I have ever known. In a direct distance of just 3 kilometers, the road descends 1,700 meters from the height of Lovtschen to sea level. In order to allow for this, the road is 20 kilometers long. There are places where one cannot imagine how one can follow the path: below an almost vertical stone wall and in front of us a rocky ledge. The next bend brings us the surprising solution, showing that, in spite of everything, it was possible to find a way. And this road is not difficult to travel, as it is wide and the curves are wide. You always have in sight the enormous group of mountains of stones that surrounds the bay. After a long walk, the inner roadstead of the port, which resembles a small lake, appears well below. The port of Cattaro is made up of three basins connected by narrow arms of the sea. On the innermost one is the small town.

Cattaro had been, after Pola, the most important war port of Austria-Hungary. It was the extreme outpost of the old monarchy in the Southern Adriatic. The border with Montenegro passed here over the Lovtschen. On that height, to which a very dangerous path led, a mighty fort was to be built, according to the principles of the time, to protect the harbor from the land side. But this was only possible if a road could be built up to the height. Austrian engineers built the marvelous work of such a road. Naturally, the primitive road was continuously improved in the course of time. When we looked from Cattaro to the vertical wall of the mountain that reached

up to the clouds, the thought of building a road along the steep stone wall seemed crazy to us. The idea and the resolution to build such a path are to be admired for their audacity.

When I later saw the fjords in Norway, the memory of Cattaro awoke in me. The bay penetrates deep into the mountain region and is of magnificent beauty. The entrance to the sea is narrow, easy to intercept and was protected by coastal batteries. From the northern margin of the central trough comes the road which, through a deep cleft in the mountains, leads to Dalmatia. We used it the next day for the trip to Ragusa, the final point of my journey at that time. We passed through places of superb beauty, such as Castelnuovo, situated on the shores of the bay, and then returned to the region of extreme poverty, where every piece of land torn from the rocks is cultivated, with corn, vines and olives predominating. Long before Ragusa the road approaches the coast and in its last stretch has been opened, by blasting, in the rocks of the seashore.

He had already seen many beautiful pictures of nature on that trip. What he had seen always prompted comparisons and judgments, which had to be continually rectified on the basis of new observations. Experience showed again that every piece of nature, be it of graceful beauty, be it of a grandiose or romantic nature, be it of a somber character, is something individual and unique, and as such must also be felt. It is not appropriate to formulate comparative evaluations in this respect.

From these reflections I only excepted Ragusa when I saw it again. The valuation of this city does not allow itself to be subordinated to principles and experiences. The old Venetian fortress, the admirable churches and

the ancient convents, the stone houses in the romantic, often incredibly narrow alleys, the gardens typical of fairy tales, the palm, rose and orange groves, the large street with ancient plane trees, all this is a wonderful harmony within a very narrow space, between the stone walls that shine in all colors and the Adriatic almost always dark blue, make Ragusa, for me, the most beautiful place on earth. It is not only the beauty of the landscape and that of the work of man that are decisive in the formation of this feeling, even if in this case both aspects are insurmountable; the ultimate charm is received by this beauty just by the spirit of men and that of the different epochs, which are manifested in everything; its inhabitants performed here a creative work, which gives the picture not only the frame but also a magical life. These wordless conversations with a rich, moving and transcendental past, which lives in this beauty, move the soul in mysterious palpitations that originate a feeling of happiness. The beauty of nature alone cannot produce this sensation.

In my many travels and journeys over a large part of the world I have not found any place outside my country where I would like to settle permanently. In spite of all the often intoxicating beauty and grandeur I have known, nowhere could I find a replacement for the mountains, streams, forests and meadows of my country and for the way of life in its cities.

Also in Ragusa and its surroundings we were continuously reminded of the state of war. In many parts of the coast there were defense works. The work of the units was made very difficult because everything had to be done after blasting the rocks. In conversations with the personnel of the units I could recognize how impressed they were by the exotic beauty of nature. The region produced only wine. The fishery, which had always been of a high yield, was largely paralyzed, for the fishermen in the Adriatic were accustomed to fish almost always at night by the light of torches and lanterns; but the circumstances of war did not permit it. British destroyers, a few days before, had fired several shots at night on the city, without causing any damage.

The next day we returned to Scutari. It was a good effort by the driver, given the deficiencies of the roads. From Cattaro we did not take the road through the Lovtschen, but went directly to Budua. It is that for an adversary occupying Budua, it is easier to attack Cattaro following this road. We then continued through areas already known. Scutari is situated on the shores of the great lake of the same name and on both sides of the Bojana, which is its outlet. Here again we reached the East; to such an extent the town and the life of its inhabitants had preserved the Turkish character. Also the journey the next day, which led us directly to Headquarters, was through a familiar region. Winter had already begun to manifest itself in the mountainous area and in the high mountains there was snow, while still two days before we were cutting oranges and mandarins in Ragusa.

During my trip I was kept daily updated on developments in the army zone. The general picture of the situation indicated that the partisan gathering in Eastern Bosnia would soon have to be considered over. Their strength in that region was estimated at about 30,000 men. The time had come to begin troop movements of their own to tighten the encirclement. The 1st Mountain Division, which in the meantime had arrived in Serbia, was directed to the Drina. The other units carried out concentric marches, partly on the roads and mostly cross-country, in order to seize important areas. The demands on the units were very great, as it was bitterly cold and a lot of snow had fallen. A great effort was made by some battalions and mountain batteries that crossed the Romanja planina, extremely rugged, almost 2,000 meters high, on whose plateau there was up to 2 meters of snow. The surprising appearance of these units in the roadless mountain brought great confusion to the partisans in that region. Such movements required, however, time.

The partisans soon recognized the situation they were in. Tito was outside the encirclement and was supposed to be in the Jajce area, some 120 kilometers northwest of Sarajevo; he must have recognized the situation at that time correctly and ordered the breakthrough to Serbia. In several parts the crossing of the Drina was attempted. A partisan leader radioed that floats and other transshipment materials had not arrived. Among the partisans there seemed to have arisen a good deal of discomfiture. Tito made severe charges of lack of energy to the commander of his II Army Corps who was driving in the bag and relieved him of his post.

The month of December was already well advanced when the circle narrowed so much that also the units of the other fronts came into combat contact with the partisans. All the attempts of the partisans to cross the Drina failed. When they saw the impossibility of the breakthrough to Serbia, they tried to get out of the pocket to the north. Even when we listened to the orders given, it was not easy to take timely countermeasures and repulse their attempts to break through, because they knew how to appear in front of our troops with surprising speed, but they also knew, with equal speed, how to interrupt the combat again and disappear. As they were always relatively numerous groupings of partisans, these were worthy demonstrations of the capacity of their commandos, whose performance was made difficult, it is true, by the fact that the partisans did not have combat material that could hinder the movements. The fighting cost losses for both sides. The partisans suffered, however, very heavy casualties from our artillery fire.

At that time the corps command, which led the partisans, sent by radio the warning: "the Germans must know our code," and ordered at the same time a change of it. For two days we had to go groping in the dark, thus creating a great expectation. But nothing happened, for the enemy during that period only scanned our front and changed his device. Also the new key was deciphered after that time. A new large-scale breakthrough attempt, in another place, failed again. In the meantime the first half of December had passed and the encirclement finally became so tight that a decision had to be reached. Since for the partisans, whose numbers had already been considerably reduced, the overall situation presented them with no prospect of success if they accepted the final decision for combat, we had to reckon with surprises. And these surprises did indeed occur.

In the north, our forces in their advance to reduce the pocket, had reached a large wooded area, very dense and without roads, which had to be partially crossed the next day. In such conditions, as is natural, there was no continuous front, without clearings. The partisans had very well recognized our movements as well as the situation and the local conditions inside the forest. They managed to discover a clearing in an area of difficult access and in one night they came out that way with their mass through the encirclement. Smaller fractions were subtracted in other directions. Their losses during the entire operation were estimated at 15,000, of which 10,000 were prisoners.

The confusion of the partisans was to be exploited and, for this reason, the operation had to be continued. Tito's forces located in the Jajce area and further south and the new ones arriving there were to be considered as a target. At that time we assumed that the Jajce area was Tito's headquarters. This small town, situated on the steep bank of the deeply embanked Vrbas, is one of the most romantic places in Bosnia. After the first operation, most of our forces were accommodated in the localities of the Bosnian valley, where they were also favorably situated for the projected continuation. The efforts made by the units were very great. Here again it was proved that the demands imposed by the partisan struggle in large and small, are not inferior to those of the

other theaters of operations. The climate, the terrain and the general insecurity of life were also very important.

During the Christmas days, the units rested and then resumed their activities. The main grouping directed on Jajce was to stagger its wings, especially the western one, to the vanguard in order to prepare an encircling movement. The 1st Mountain Division was to advance from the Sarajevo area, perpendicular to that of the main grouping and through very difficult terrain to reach the area south of Jajce, mainly the water sources in Northern Dalmatia. Again a lot of snow had fallen and the cold was still very intense. As expected, the partisans tried to defend Jajce and the surrounding area. Quite violent fighting ensued. Then they retreated in a southerly direction and were forced by the German forces advancing in echelon on the right wing and by the Mountain Division to engage in combat several more times. Their pursuit continued as far as Central Dalmatia, where the remnants of their groupings were disbanded. In Jajce Tito's headquarters, several sheds in the vicinity of rock caverns were occupied. The most recent photographs of Tito were also found there.

During the period of the partisan assembly marches and the subsequent fighting, hand strikes and assaults in Croatia decreased considerably. Only in Slavonia, in the region north of the Save, did they continue in relatively large numbers. There the maintenance of traffic on the 400-kilometer-long Belgrade-Agram railway line remained a problem. For its effective security several Divisions would have been needed, which, for that purpose, were not available. Thus, there were numerous explosions on the track and mine attacks against the trains by the partisans. Traffic was, it is true, interrupted, but not prevented. The region from which attacks on the track were mainly carried out was for a long time the Papuk range, a wooded region of difficult transit which, north of the Save and halfway between Belgrade and Agram, forms a wide arc around the Pozega depression. Occasional undertakings by weak German troops in that region produced a marked relief. On the other hand, in the Army Corps and Divisional areas large or small enterprises were permanently carried on. Their object was to give the partisans no respite, not to allow them to organize quietly and also to produce casualties. Not infrequently they had to be expelled from the vicinity of the resupply roads, which they threatened.

There was no German soldier to whom the partisan war was sympathetic. In the weeks following my arrival in the Balkans I received more than 1,000 applications from servicemen of all ranks asking to be transferred to the Russian theater of operations, even though large-scale fighting was going on there continuously. I had to prohibit the submission of such applications as there was no likelihood that such passes would be granted. However, the idiosyncrasy of the German soldiers, most of whom had already taken part in battles and who knew very well the conditions of fighting in Russia, would be unknown if it were supposed that an adventurous spirit was the motive for their desire to move away from the Balkans, where there was only a small war, consisting of fighting against the partisans.

One reason lay, first of all, in the fact that the partisans did not conduct war in the manner of soldiers and did not abide by the laws of war. The cruelty of their way of fighting demanded that the soldier replied harshly if he simply wanted to safeguard his existence. I have not known of a single instance of cruelty, under such circumstances, on the part of German soldiers. If the British Brigadier General Fitzroy Maclean, the head of the British liaison organ with Tito, in his book "Eastern Approaches" (edited by Jonathan Cape, London, 1950), speaks of cruelties of German soldiers, then he confuses the German soldiers with the Ustacha, the party guard of the Croatian head of state, who fought a life and death struggle with the partisans, Balkan style, and who wore uniforms similar to those of the Germans. The general is otherwise well aware of the circumstances. His description of the partisans culminates with the words: "They do not
They neither gave nor expected quarter. P. 331).

We did not have the impression that Tito encouraged the cruelty of the partisans. On the contrary, we were certain that he was trying to take prisoners in order to exchange them for partisan prisoners by means of negotiation.

The following fact is characteristic: one of our best aviators did not return from an exploration flight. His plane had last been seen over Western Montenegro. When several days had already passed, we picked up a

radiogram from Tito to a Montenegrin brigade in which Tito ordered to communicate immediately "why the German airman, contrary to the order, had been killed". We also picked up the reply. It contained the excuse of a misunderstanding. As the area of that brigade was known, an enterprise was immediately launched against it, in the course of which the semi-carbonized corpse of the airman was found.

Another reason why the circumstances in the Balkans were not pleasant for the soldier was that, in certain cases, he was forced to proceed also against parts of the population in order to combat their hostile attitude and support for the partisans. An important part of the population sympathized with the partisans. It fed them, hid them, passed on news to them and helped them in every way. Without the help of this part of the population, the partisans would not have been able to carry out even a fraction of their assaults against the lives of German soldiers and the means of transport of the army. The aforementioned General Maclean says in this respect: "They (the partisans) enjoyed, too, the support of the civilian population, deeply imbued with the tradition of resistance to the foreign invader, Teuton or Latin, Magyar or Turk. P. 300).

Field fighting corresponds to the idiosyncrasies of the German soldier, but not the fight against partisans, with all its consequences. A high-ranking military commander also has other ideas of war and fighting, and therefore I, too, had a longing for another assignment, but I could not ask for it, nor could my soldiers. I had, however, hoped that the friction with the political officials in my jurisdiction would help me in that sense, since the military, in such matters, has always come out the worst. I will leave that, however, for later.

The supply of the partisans was very deficient. They requisitioned provisions from the population in the regions not occupied by our troops. They also organized food depots in the areas they believed to be safe. Thus during an investigation in one such area, German units captured 3,000 sheep. At first the British threw them ammunition, explosives, medicines and, to a small extent, subsistence supplies in certain areas; later, the Americans did the same. Especially after the frequent evacuations of their depot areas on the occasion of our enterprises on a greater or lesser scale, their supplies were insufficient and they suffered great privations.

Since the winter of 1943/1944 the Allies tried to improve this situation by bringing in supplies by sea, which were then transported by the partisans on their roads to the interior of the country. This was possible, because the extensive coastline could not be guarded in such a way that there were no clearings. At first it was also not feasible to occupy the very numerous islands situated at a short distance from the coast; they constituted the starting bases for the smuggling of the various provisions. There were a large number of large and small islands. Almost all of them were occupied by the partisans. The fight for possession of the islands had, therefore, to be carefully prepared, especially as regards the mustering of smaller vessels. The season also had to be taken into account. The most appropriate was late spring. There was thus ample time available.

The winter with its heavy snowfalls in the mountains interrupted my reconnaissance trips for some time. Until then I had traveled the penetration roads from the Albanian coast to Serbia and Macedonia, then Albania itself and especially its coast and, in addition, Central Bosnia, Southern Montenegro and a large part of Dalmatia. Of particular urgency was to extend and complete the coastal picture. On the other side of the Adriatic Sea, only 100 kilometers wide, there were Americans and British, who in their offensive in Italy arrived in March 1944 at the height of Peschiera, which corresponded approximately to the shore on this side at the height of Cattaro. While the Allies were engaged there in hard combats, it was not to be supposed that they were going to diminish their forces and to try a landing on great scale also in the Balkans; it could be counted, yes, with companies of some magnitude to support the partisans, especially also to assure their supply.

Radiograms of the partisans captured in March provided us with timely elements of judgment on the intentions of the Allies in the Balkans. The group of partisans from Vis Island communicated at that time to Tito that the British were preparing a landing in the Balkans. Tito replied by radiogram that this was not accurate, because on the basis of the agreement between the allies there would not be a landing of the western powers in the Balkans. I was convinced that Tito's answer corresponded to the facts and that it was not a deceptive maneuver. It was not, however, to exert any influence on our actions. The preparation of the coast for its defense was, on the contrary, to be pursued energetically. It is precisely in war that plans and intentions are not

infrequently subject to unexpected modifications.

In my reconnaissance in the army zone I often had to think how different the landscape and the people of the Balkans are from those of Russia. How simple, indeed, seemed the Russian landscape, in spite of its infinite vastness and grandeur! Never from it does history speak. If we disregard a few large cities, we find no monuments or works of man's hand that recall the past and constitute a link between that long-past epoch and the present. He who contemplates this landscape does not find concrete objects of a singular individuality that can incite his reflection and point out its limits. Everywhere it is directed to the abstract. The eternal, constant and powerful manifestation precisely of the simplicity and simplicity of this landscape in union with its unapproachable vastness is, for the people who must spend their entire lives there, too great and too heavy a coexistence to be able to adjust to it. All this leads them to withdraw into themselves; it drives them to maximum introspection and gives rise to problematic idiosyncrasies.

Diametrically opposite is what happens in the Balkans. Each of the numerous peoples living on this peninsula is by its origin, religion and history a special individuality, which is clearly and consciously different from the others. In their long tradition, these peoples, also consciously, have rejected all close mutual contact. The attempt undertaken by the Yugoslav state, created shortly after the World War II, to unify the peoples living in it in order to make it a single state, has also failed.

Also the landscape of the Balkans is the expression of the greatest antagonisms and differences. Vast plains, rugged rocky mountains and gloomy forests follow one another without transitions; the sea influences wide regions and everywhere the testimonies of the past emerge in the present. Moreover, the rocky regions of Croatia present other aspects than those of Albania, the oak forests of Croatia are different from the virgin forests of Bosnia, the plains of Slavonia cannot be compared with the coastal plains of Albania or those of Northern Dalmatia. Also the dwellings of men show the whole scale from the most rudimentary stone hut in many regions of Dalmatia, Montenegro and Albania to the spacious and beautiful houses.

The most important of these were the well-built villages in the wide river valleys of Servia and in the region between the Save and the Drave in Croatia.

Also the material testimonies of past times, which are preserved everywhere and in abundant quantity and many of which still serve for the present life, recall a very different past in the wide coastal area, in Bosnia, in Albania or in the interior of Croatia or in Serbia. Great differences are apparent, finally, in the main cities. Belgrade has almost completely lost its oriental coloring to adopt the modern lack of style; Sarajevo still impresses entirely as a Turkish-Eastern fairy tale; the urban picture of Agram, with its balanced harmony full of style, is that of a beautiful city of Central Europe. We cannot, therefore, speak of the landscape of the Balkans, for there are many.

The landscapes of the Balkans are beautiful and often grandiose; but they are not overwhelming in their magnitude and have nothing of the indescribable secret and mystery of the Russian landscape. The enormous multiplicity of its manifestations is tied to the individuality of men. These multiple landscapes work on the souls of men, encouraging each one to be in a different way; it is the result of men having to struggle with landscapes, the fact that each one has a different nature. In this way, all landscapes contribute to form individuals with their own marked characteristics. The fiery men of the Balkans are not nearly as introverted as the Russians, for the influences of the varied environment around them signal the sense of the outside world and stimulate the drive to action. The sons of the Balkan countries are not soldiers. The Croats belonged to the best soldiers of the Habsburg empire and were especially so in the World War II. In that war the Serbs, Bosnians and Montenegrins performed with analogous form, according to their traditional conditions of combatants. The men in the Balkans are powerfully animated of activity, if we except the remains of Turkish lethargy. The trips in these countries and the stays in their cities are full of variety and always incite to new reflections and the trips in Russia, on the other hand, induce the soul and the thoughts to withdraw into their inner world.

The progress of the Allies in Italy brought for us the unpleasant consequence that from that time on their fighter and bomber planes flew almost daily over the Balkan coastal area well into the mainland. During the day, the road traffic was disturbed to a considerable extent. Reports were received daily of trucks set on fire by gunfire and often also of casualties. Security against enemy aircraft required the uninterrupted attention of everyone in a vehicle. It was soon learned that if, while on a straight road, the approach of an aircraft in flight was observed at the limit of sight, the vehicle should be abandoned within 15 seconds at the most from that moment and take cover on the ground in order to evade the aviator's projectiles.

It is true that many planes were also shot down from the ground, in which aviator traps played an important role. It was known that enemy aviators would preferentially attack vehicles on straight stretches of road, as they could then approach them under favorable conditions. Old trucks or imitations were then placed on such roads and a certain number of machine guns and light anti-aircraft guns were brought into position on both sides on the ground. It was thus possible to beat the aircraft under favorable conditions during its approach flight and often to shoot it down. Without fighter protection we could hardly fly and we had only a small number of fighters and often none at all.

5. Balkans

Organization of the defense in Dalmatia.

Tito's organization is destroyed.

Preparations for the fight for the islands were completed at the beginning of April. Shortly thereafter we began operations against the islands, first of all against those located close to the mainland. Due to the forces and means available only a few of these enterprises could be carried out simultaneously. It was thus a time-consuming activity. The enterprises themselves placed high demands on the units. They were exposed to all the risks of improvisation. The troops, with no maritime experience, undertook the night journey to the islands, often several kilometers distant, in small boats of all kinds: barges, assault boats, fishing boats, etc., almost always without fire support and often under partisan fire. The landing places and the conditions of access to the interior of the islands could only be recognized in a precarious way by observations from the coast or from occupied islands. Already from the purely nautical point of view the landing was often a difficult maneuver and not less serious than the subsequent combat. The latter often involved enemy aviators who also destroyed numerous vessels. I decided then to move to the Dalmatian coast, the most important sector for the supply of the partisans; I wanted to travel in that opportunity to other regions where I had not been.

At that time the passes in southern Bosnia, especially the important Ivan Pass, south of Sarajevo, were already so free of snow that they could be crossed by vehicles. The journey had to be made through Eastern Slavonia and through Bosnia to Central and Northern Dalmatia. The stretch through Slavonia was traveled by rail. Our car and accompanying vehicles were loaded in Belgrade on a special train and we moved on this one along the northern margin on the smooth, billiard-table-like plain of Sirmia, the eastern part of Slavonia. This is one of the most fertile regions of Europe, covered in summer by endless wheat fields. In order to facilitate the safety service of the track, wide strips were cut down in the forests, in some parts reaching to the vicinity of the rails. In the evening we arrived at Brod, a quiet little town on the Save, halfway between Belgrade and Agram. From there a narrow gauge track leads through Sarajevo to the Adriatic Sea.

The next morning we drove south through the valley of the Bosnia, which flows into the Save, near Brod. Shortly after, we reached the mountainous, partly wooded region, which hemmed in the river, which was very much swollen by the early spring thaws and rains. We crossed large well-built villages; each one had a mosque. Part of the population is Mohammedan. Of special interest to me were the villages Doboje and Maglaj, where the first big fights took place during the occupation of Bosnia, in the year 1878, in which the imperial and royal Austro-Hungarian troops also gathered their first experience in the fight against the partisans. In Maglaj a squadron of hussars was ambushed by the partisans and completely exterminated. Also in my time that region,

especially west of Bosnia, was heavily infested by the partisans; on the most important roads and along the railway line there were for security purposes a certain number of units, which I was able to inspect on that occasion.

In the evening we arrived in Sarajevo. This city is always attractive, although at the beginning of spring its appearance is more sober and less polychrome than in summer or autumn. The next day, we crossed

by a good road through the high mountains of Southern Bosnia and Northern Herzegovina. In the mountains, the road is rack and pinion for a stretch. Ivan Pass and the mountains near it still had a lot of snow. The pass is located on the watershed, some of which flow northward to the Save and with it to the Danube, and the others, through the emerald green Narenta, to the Adriatic Sea. The rocky valley of the Narenta, which we were now following, is often so narrow that its bottom is completely occupied by the river, the road and the railway line that often passes through tunnels. The lush forests that cover the mountains at the height of the Ivan Pass become increasingly sparse and stunted to the south until they disappear altogether and give way to thickets that lead a precarious life in the flat crevices of the mountains. This region was continuously threatened by partisans, so the security forces were also denser and more numerous. In some posts there were also batteries. So far the attacks on the railroad had been unsuccessful, although shortly before a bridge on the road had been blown up.

In a slight widening of the valley, deeply embedded in the bare rocky mountains, lies Mostar, the capital of Herzegovina. In the clearly oriental cityscape, the Narenta stands out beautifully. Immediately south of Mostar opens up a wide plain on which the airfield is located. One immediately wonders why the city was initially built in the narrow valley that offers little space, instead of on that wide and free plain. It was reasons of easier defense against attacks or assaults that evidently weighed decisively on its first builders at a time many centuries ago. Given the way of fighting in those times, the situation of the city is really ideal.

We turned towards Lise, a small town west of Mostar, where the new headquarters of the 5th SS Mountain Corps was located. It was moved there from Sarajevo, because the center of gravity of the distribution of forces had shifted to the coast. The Corps, to whose area also belonged the coast of Montenegro and Dalmatia up to Split, exclusively, had adequately organized the defense of the coast after receiving new forces. It had also succeeded in preventing the smuggling of supplies which, until recently, had been carried out in this area by partisans from the islands through the unguarded coastal sectors.

Of special interest in this region are the tombs that the old Croats erected for their drivers up to the 9th century, that is, during the first two centuries of their settlement in their present area of residence. The tombs consist of a square recumbent block of almost black granite, half a meter thick, on the center of which an analogous block has been placed vertically. Depending on the category of the deceased, 3, 5, 7 to 9 gothic swords are engraved on it, arranged parallel to each other, and above them a box of centaur flowers and swastikas. In the mountainous area of Croatia from Herzegovina to the northwestern border about three thousand graves of this type have been preserved. They are also considered to be important testimonies of the Gothic origin of the Croats.

The next day's goal was Split. The road leads first of all through the Dalmatian hinterland. It was necessary to proceed very cautiously because the roads in this region, where there were few forces, were often mined by the partisans. The partisans laid the mines in a very ingenious way thanks to the support they received from their foreign friends. The rocky terrain was strewn with an innumerable quantity of more or less large stones, many of which were also used to strengthen the road. The partisans mixed mines among the stones employed for the latter purpose; these mines were inside papier-mâché covers which, by their shape and color, entirely resembled those pieces of stone. Mines were also employed which by their greenish-black color resembled mule droppings often seen on the roads. All these mines were suitable for destroying or seriously damaging a vehicle. They were so skillfully made that it was not possible to recognize them. The minesweeper material, The trip behind a minesweeper vehicle was, of course, very monotonous. The trip behind a minesweeper vehicle was, of course, very monotonous. One often tends to become independent of it. But the detection of four

mines on the way to Split taught us something different.

Well south of Split, we find several batteries that were part of the defense of this port. The port itself is not very big. The city that approaches with its most beautiful parts up to the coastal street, is full of testimonies and remains of a rich history, like most of the coastal cities of Dalmatia. It would take whole weeks to study those traces and all their often hidden attractions. The old core of the town is mostly built within the still existing wall surrounding the palace that the Roman emperor Diocletian had himself erected here. This famous ruler was a son of the Balkans, for he was born in 239 A.D. in Dioclea, today's Duple, located on the border between Montenegro and Albania, and out of disgust for the degeneration of Rome he retired to Salona and Split. The aspect of the present Split dates, however, from the beginning of the Middle Ages, when the pavilion of Venice dominated the margins of the Adriatic Sea. It is remarkable how much of the spirit of an era can be preserved in stone. In Split, the spirit of centuries far away and at the same time far apart was presented to us. Here we find in a very narrow space completely different manifestations of historical life. But since all of them are, with a certain refinement, representatives of their epochs, they also work together in an admirably harmonious way. The only thing that was out of place were, in my opinion, the numerous defensive works on the coast that I would inspect in the jurisdiction of this city. I had to recall the old Venetian castle of Ragusa which, in its time, also served for the defense of the port and is a product of war, but which, notwithstanding its dimensions, required by its purpose, produces an impression of manifest beauty. This comparison, together with expressions of war in later times, allows us to clearly recognize that war, the closer it comes to the present, the more objective and prosaic it becomes.

The continuation of the trip the next day took us to the small town of Trau (Trogir), located about 30 kilometers away. It is the true architectural jewel of the Adriatic Sea. In front of the town and separated from the mainland by a narrow channel, there is a long island, on which there are some coastal batteries.

In Trau the good road ends. We now head inland on a rocky and rough road to Sibenik. The region we cross is indeed one of the poorest in Dalmatia. Everywhere there is only rock and stone. In the small folds and hollows where a little humus accumulates, vines thrive. Even the few olive trees, easy to content, show little vitality. Here and there you can see an old oak tree, incredibly gnarled. In isolation we find shacks of the most rudimentary kind, built entirely of stone, in which the few inhabitants of this region were housed. The coast here forms numerous small inlets that are easily accessible from land. This region acquired a greater importance since the winter when in Southern Dalmatia it was possible to prevent, in a very effective way, the smuggling of supplies by the partisans, as they were now trying to get their provisions to this area and to that north of Zara. As we did not yet have the forces for a more effective surveillance of the coast, mobile detachments were used to seize the partisan transports and to fight them.

In front of Sibenik the terrain rises to a rocky ridge, from whose height we saw below us the very articulated bay, dotted with a large number of islands. This bay entirely resembles certain stretches of the coastal waters of Norway and Southern Finland. Sibenik has all the charms of the port cities of the Adriatic. But it surpasses almost all of them by the beauty of its surroundings, which are further enhanced by the valley of the Kerka, which leads to the sea.

mouth here. That city, and especially that of Scardona, located a short distance upstream, were Roman settlements and for centuries have been the subject of archaeological excavations. The defense works in this area were well advanced. But even here I had to convince myself that with the existing forces, there was little prospect of successfully holding the coast against a superior attacker.

We then headed inland across the Dalmatian plain, which has a low yielding soil for agriculture, to the small town of Knin, some 50 kilometers away, our objective for the day. Halfway there we reached the small town of Dernisch, where I visited the command of the 267th Division, which the day before had lost its new commander. On his first trip to the front, his vehicle had hit a mine and he had been seriously wounded. His driver and his companion were killed.

Knin has a very modern appearance and lies at the foot of the pass formed by the steep mountain ranges of the Velebit and the Dinaric Alps that lie there; over the latter passes the border between Croatia and Dalmatia.

Some destroyed houses spoke of the English air raid carried out shortly before. In a ravine near the locality, the headquarters of the XV Mountain Corps, which shortly before had been transferred there, coming from Banja Luka, was lodged in former Italian barracks. When I found myself at the foot of the steep rocky walls of the high mountains with only a few points of passage, it became even more evident to me that a strong attacker could only be prevented from penetrating into the interior of the Balkans at the entrances to the mountains. The existing forces for that mission had to be reached as well. I analyzed with the commanding general of the Corps this matter for which the corresponding studies had already been carried out. In the north of the Dalmatian plain lies the region of Upper Croatia, with its port village Senj, a region which had hardly been trodden upon by our troops and which was a strong partisan center. The 392nd Division, which had just arrived and was subordinate to the Corps, had been assigned as a garrison for this region.

The next day I moved to Zara through the northern part of the Dalmatian plain. In the Zara area some islands had already been occupied by our troops, mostly after fights against partisans. The enterprises continued. I could also see the great progress in the works for the defense of the coast. It is a strange thing about defense work: it can never be said to be finished. There is always something to improve, expand, complete and reinforce. When the attack comes, one sees that which is superfluous; but also that, at the same time, despite all the reflections and plans, something has not been sufficiently considered. This is due to the not sufficiently foreseeable measures of the adversary, who rarely does us the service of attacking us in the parts recognized by him as strong for the defense, and then in the infinite variety of the situations in the fight, which result independent of the intentions of the attacker and of the measures of the defense. From this, however, one can only draw the lesson that it is always better to foresee and prepare more and not to be satisfied with what has already been done.

Zara was the last place we visited on this long trip. On the return trip we did the same route, albeit on longer days; much of what we had missed on the outward journey, we were able to inspect on the return trip. The trip provided me with a wealth of impressions and knowledge. I had again taken up liaison with the commanders and with the troop units and informed myself about their life, their thoughts, their struggles and their work. I gathered valuable insights into the geographical environment and the conditions of defense. It was the last long trip I made in the Balkans.

Shortly after my return to headquarters I was surprised by the news, which aroused my disgust, that a price of one million kuna had been put on Tito's head. I still remember with all precision the indignant aversion against that measure felt by the officers of my command, gathered for the study of the situation. I was about to intervene in the matter when

I learned that the government offices in Agram and in the other cities had already made known, on large posters, the fixing of the price. I pointed out to the OKW, with all vigor, the great military and psychological disadvantages of this measure and emphasized that Tito and his supporters had every reason to see in it the expression of a certain weakness. I learned on that occasion that the Croatian government was the driving factor in this question and that in that respect it was especially stimulated by the German minister. That government had nothing to offer its people. Now it was trying to influence their spirit with such measures.

The fixing of a price on Tito's head also made it impossible to realize my long-held intention of making contact with Tito for the purpose of the broadest possible humanization of the conduct of the struggle. Since it was a question of negotiation with the enemy, it was natural that such a step could not be initiated without Hitler's approval. I knew that before my transfer to the Balkans, on the occasion of a then projected contact with Tito for a different reason, Hitler had refused with the words, "I do not deal with rebels." But I was convinced that I would have succeeded in getting him to accept my opinion.

The campaign of persecution against the Pravo Slavs had again taken on more intense forms in the spring. In some localities I had newspapers requisitioned which, contrary to my order, had published an inciting article against them, and I had their printing presses closed for 14 days. Since the newspapers no longer dared to publish such articles, the foreign offices of the Croatian Ministry of Propaganda had had incendiary text leaflets

printed in large quantities, which were to be distributed among the population. We also managed to seize most of these leaflets. I then expressed to the Croatian head of state, in a note, that anyone who started a new hate campaign, I would have him arrested and court-martialed by a German court-martial. After that there was calm. I am convinced that tens of thousands of Pravo Slavs would have been killed if I had not intervened.

This was by no means a simple matter, since an order of the Führer was in force to the effect that the allied Croatia was a sovereign state and that the activity of its government should be supported. The German Minister Plenipotentiary charged me that I was proceeding against the Führer's order, to which I replied that the order I had received from the Führer prescribed, among other things, also the pacification of Croatia and that for me this order was the most urgent thing. I reproached the Minister Plenipotentiary that he was not defending the interests of the Reich, which in the Balkans were primarily of a military nature, but those of the Croatian government clique. I soon severed all relations with the German legation in Agram and forbade them also to the officers of my command.

This, however, was not the end of the matter. The Reich Foreign Minister complained about me to Hitler for meddling in Croatian internal politics. When I heard about it, I expected with certainty that I would not be proven right and that I would be relieved and removed from the Balkans. A meeting was held at the Führer's headquarters in which, in addition to von Ribbentrop, Minister Plenipotentiary Kasche and the German General in Agram, von Glaise and various organs of the OKW and the Foreign Office took part. When Hitler appeared and somewhat nervously inquired about the object of the meeting, he was informed by von Ribbentrop that it was a delimitation of the powers of the Commander-in-Chief in the Western Balkans, in order to avoid future differences both between him and the Minister Plenipotentiary and between him and the Croatian government. Hitler read a portion of the draft order presented to him, then slowly tore the paper in half and left the room with the words: "This is too complicated. Leave it to Rendulic, who understands the Balkans more than all of you put together." When I heard about this from General von Glaise, I was very glad for the success of my measures for the protection of the Pravo Slavs; but I also had one less hope.

In the meantime, the fighting for the islands continued. To the army was subordinated also the coastal hunter detachment of the Brandenburg Division, which had arrived by train in Fiume with its armed motorized boats. That detachment, very experienced in island fighting, with its suitable elements, brought valuable support to the units, so that the fighting could now be continued in a methodical way. Thus, by the beginning of July 1944, all the islands had been gradually occupied, with the exception of the large island of Vis in the southern Adriatic, in whose waters the Austrian Admiral Tegetthof defeated the Italian fleet, which was several times superior. The island was occupied, in addition to the partisans, by the British who had organized here a support point for Tito's supply and installed an airfield for light airplanes. The attempt to occupy this island had to be given up in view of our forces and means.

With the conquest of the other islands, the supply of the partisans from the sea had already been practically cut off. Numerous news agreed that they were already experiencing an appreciable shortage, especially in food, since the supply by air was of reduced yield and was limited mainly to ammunition and explosives, the use of which was of more urgent interest to the Allies. Also for that reason I counted on a new attempt to break through important partisan forces to the east, within a short period of time.

The occupation of the islands, which prevented the partisans from being supplied by the Allies, prompted British "commando" troops to carry out numerous undertakings against the German forces on the islands. In one of the first, apparently carried out at night, the small garrison of the island Solta, in the region of Split, was surprised and totally eliminated. Other British ventures, however, were no longer successful. The forces on the islands had been installed in footholds with good barbed wire. At the beginning of June a brigade of commandos made a surprise night attack on the large island of Brac, off the coast of southern Dalmatia. A fierce fight ensued, in which the British suffered severe casualties and before dawn retreated to their ships without achieving their aims. On that occasion many prisoners were taken; among them was Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Churchill, who had led the enterprise. This chief, before being transported, wrote a letter to the captain Chief of the battalion that took him prisoner, in which he thanked him for the correctness with which the captain and his

soldiers had treated him. Almost a year before my assumption of command in the Balkans the so-called "order on commandos" had been issued to the German units in the Balkans; but they had had no reason to apply it until then, for the troops of the English commandos conducted the combat on the islands openly and as soldiers.

In the spring of 1944, the partisan movement began to make itself felt very strongly also in southern Albania. It was nourished by the communist part of the partisans in bordering Greece. In Albania we encouraged the formation of the "national bands", as they called themselves, which were led by prestigious Albanians and which fought against the communist partisans. In such a combat, in which German forces also took part, the British General Davis, who was with the partisans, fell into the hands of a national band, seriously wounded by a bullet through his lung. He was transferred to the German unit and evacuated to a military hospital in Tirana. Although, according to international law, he had the status of a sniper, he was, in my opinion, a soldier, fighting on behalf of his country, which was in a state of war with ours. We sent the best surgeon in the army to Tirana to treat him; he managed to save his life.

Since the winter struggles in eastern Bosnia no relatively large action against the partisans had been undertaken, as the demand for forces for the island struggles did not permit it. Nor had Tito undertaken an undertaking of any significance, limiting himself to frequent attacks and small assaults. After the occupation of Jajce, where Tito's headquarters had hitherto been located, there was uncertainty for some time as to where he was staying; then there was a coinciding report that his new headquarters was in Drvar. It was also possible to locate his radio station in that area. Drvar is a large village, located east of the road from Knin to Bihac, in western Croatia, in a difficult to reach and rugged area of the Dinaric Alps. The last time German forces were temporarily in this remote area was in the autumn of 1943; shortly afterwards, when the Italians broke away, these forces were moved to the coast.

In Drvar the valley of the Una, which up to there only has the magnitude of a stream, widens. The locality itself is close to a rocky wall, in which, at a height of several meters, is the entrance to a cavern in the vicinity of which would be Titus' lodging. On a small hill in the valley near the village is the cemetery. The heights surrounding the village are densely covered with trees, except for the aforementioned rock wall. The forest extends eastward for about 50 to 70 kilometers and northward for 20 to 30 kilometers. The scouting checked on the borders of these forests important partisan forces. Also in the south there were extensive forests. To the west, as far as the Knin-Bihac road, the terrain was mid-mountain, difficult to pass through, cracked and partly wooded. To the north a fairly passable road led to the Petrovac pit, some 25 kilometers distant, and to the south another to Grahovo, located at the same distance. Aerial photography showed numerous barriers on these roads.

In May 1944, the relations of forces made it possible to conduct the long-planned operation against Tito's new headquarters and the partisan units in its vicinity. This time a battalion of paratroopers was also available, which was assembled, with its planes and transport gliders, at the Kraljevo airfield. The attack was to be carried out with several groups from different directions. A motorized grouping was to advance from the north, starting from Petrovac, and another from the south, starting from Grahovo, both over Drvar. A grouping composed of several battalions and some guns was to advance from the west, starting from the Knin-Bihac road through the roadless mountain. It was calculated that this column would be the one that would reach Drvar the earliest, since it was counted that the motorized groupings would lose a lot of time in repairing the destructions and in eliminating the barriers. From the east were to advance forces of the strength of a Division. Heavy resistance was expected here and, in addition, an extensive wooded area was to be crossed. Exit from the forest to the north and south was to be made by weak groupings.

The first surprise attack was to be carried out by the parachute battalion, which was to launch and land in the vicinity of Drvar, and immediately move on to attack the headquarters. After that, for about 24 hours it was to hold its own. Then the intervention of the forces coming from the west was counted on. The arrival of the ground forces to their areas of preparation was veiled with great care. The motorized groups reached their departure zones only at the last moment.

In view of the favorable forecast for flights, May 25 was fixed for the attack. On that day the paratroopers left

in the transport planes and in the gliders towed by them, so that at 0700 hours they were over the target. The launching and landing went smoothly, except for a few minor accidents. The battalion assembled and proceeded immediately to Tito's quarters at the entrance to the cave. Here his personal guard put up a fight and put up resistance to the last man. This enabled Titus to escape and hide in the immediate forest. Resistance was put up in the locality, especially at the fixed telegraph station, the building of which was defended exclusively by women. Only after throwing hand grenades did the paratroopers manage to seize it.

Among those who managed to escape was also Winston Churchill's son, Randolph, who was in Tito's headquarters. Instead, two correspondents of major American newspapers were taken prisoner. The battalion then prepared for defense on the height near the cemetery, but was not subjected to any attack. The following morning the grouping from the west arrived at Drvar, as expected, while the motorized groupings reached their objective only in the afternoon of that day, after overcoming numerous difficulties on the road. In Drvar an abundant documentation was captured, as well as many American, English and Russian films.

After the surprise attack on Drvar, we lost sight of Tito. He no longer had his main radiotelegraph station. In the following days, numerous partisan groups unsuccessfully called Tito's station. Then they asked other groups to find out the situation. Finally, the VIII partisan corps took command. After about 14 days Tito's orders were heard again, given through the radiotelegraph station of his VIII Corps. Since then, we no longer heard a radiotelegraph station of Tito's own; indications as to the place of his lodging were also missing. Some vague reports indicated that he was on the island of Vis, but we were unable to obtain any certainty in this regard.

The first indication is given by the British liaison officer with Tito, General Maclean, on page 210 of his aforementioned book, in which he states:

"Then, one day, when they were resting, at the end of a long march (that is after the attack on Drvar), Tito sent for me (through Maclean's collaborator, Vivian). I found the marshal tired and dejected. He told him that he had come to the conclusion, contrary to his wishes, that it was impossible for him to continue directing the operations of his forces in Yugoslavia while being chased through the forests and kept constantly on the move. His complex task made it essential for him to have a relatively firm base for his headquarters. He had already lost liaison with almost all the groups under his command. For this reason he had to ask Vivian to arrange for the evacuation by air of both himself and his headquarters to Italy, until the time came that would allow his return to Yugoslavia" (p.453).

Tito was flown to Italy with his staff and the British and Russian missions, Maclean's later reports, and shortly thereafter settled on Vis Island.

While the Drvar area soon became quiet, fighting continued in the eastern part of the forest region. There the resistance of the partisans was very stubborn, so that the units gained ground only slowly. A part of the partisans tried here to slip away to the east, i.e., through our troops. At first we attributed this intention to the fear of being encircled, since our troops, after having reached the objective, were advancing concentrically against the large wooded region. The real motives became evident to us, however, when a careful study of the captured radiograms provided us with the surprising verification that numerous partisan divisions from different parts of Croatia were again on the move towards eastern Bosnia. Some fractions, which probably had not used their radiotelegraphic material, had already arrived there. The forces in the forest had undoubtedly also been ordered to participate in this movement, an order given at a time before the operation against Drvar. In this case, it would only be possible to try again to break towards Serbia. However, it was still possible to gather forces in time in the area of the bend of the Drina between Zvornik and Bajna-Basta and to prevent the attempt by an attack of their own.

Neither the troops nor the time were sufficient to encircle the partisans, so that, after the failure of their first attempt to break through, they managed to move towards southern Bosnia.

and northern Montenegro, to which the forces that were still advancing were also directed. In these extremely difficult-to-traverse areas they now tried again to break through to Serbia. Fierce fighting broke out in one of the most difficult regions of the Balkans, but we were able to bring sufficient forces into this region in good time. The partisans no longer had, or about, the shock force they showed in the winter, nor were they led as firmly. After a few days it was possible to consider their intention as failed.

The fighting was still in full swing when, on the night of June 23-24, I received the order to report to the Führer's headquarters at the Berghof near Berchtesgaden on June 24, with the addition that a return to the Balkans was out of the question. In order to be able to make the flight over the Alps in any weather, a four-engine Condor was placed at my disposal at the Semlin airfield near Belgrade.

As with all previous relays, this one also took me completely by surprise. The order woke me from my sleep in the middle of the night. I was surprised by the great urgency of my arrival at the Führer's headquarters. But, as a first spiritual reaction, I experienced a sense of relief at being able to leave the Balkans. I had, however, to think of the many soldiers who very willingly wanted to get away from there and whose wishes I was not in a position to satisfy; I told myself that I, too, would undoubtedly have had to stay if a special situation had not arisen that would have led to my relief.

1. Lapland

New mission: 20th Mountain Army Command.

First orientation: Visit to Mannerheim.

The trip to Belgrade required almost four hours. For this reason we left very early in the morning. I was only able to say goodbye to my closest collaborators. The road, so often used, now crossed intensively cultivated, summery-looking land; the atmosphere was as peaceful as if there were no war.

I reflected deeply on the events in which I had acted during the last few months. I was convinced that I had accomplished my mission in accordance with the forces available. The days of intense tension for the elimination of the Italian fighting forces, the risks run and the resolutions adopted many times in the most complete uncertainty appeared before my eyes. Then came the occupation of new regions and the organization of the coast for its defense. I would have wished my mission to end there. Then came the fight against the partisans, which did not correspond to the desire of any soldier. It had to be fought for the safety of the roads leading to the coast and then, in a general way, to make the life of the German units in the Balkans possible. In several great operations and in numerous other small ones, carried out without interruption, the partisans were always beaten; thus avoiding the constant increase of their forces, so that in the end they were no longer capable of carrying out operational enterprises of any magnitude, as it was evidenced by the fights that continued developing in the southeast of Bosnia and in Montenegro.

Of the many assignments I had in the war, none I left with as much satisfaction as the command in chief in the Western Balkans. I was completely unaware, however, of where I was going.

I made my farewell presentation to the commander-in-chief of the Army Group in Belgrade, Marshal von Weichs, and shortly after noon I left with the Condor from the Semlin airfield. We flew over Sirmia and Slavonia, in the direction of Agram and from this city we took a direct course to Salzburg. The flight led obliquely over the Alps; we soon reached dense cloud masses and finally climbed to 5,400 meters. Below us we saw an enclosed sea of clouds and above us the clear sky. In spite of the summer heat on the ground, at this altitude an intense cold was felt, forcing us to turn on the heating. The rarefaction of the air induced us to resort frequently to the oxygen apparatus. The separation from the earth, of which nothing could be seen, produced the impression of infinite solitude. Only shortly before Salzburg the cloud cover was somewhat torn, some mountain peaks were visible and in tight curls the big plane was losing altitude and landed at the small airfield. After a short trip, I arrived in Berchtesgaden.

At the hotel I met General Böhme and from him I learned of my new assignment: the 20th Mountain Army in Lapland. I had the mission to learn briefly, before Hitler's study of the situation, about the circumstances in the far north, where I had led the 18th Mountain Corps for a long time. To those regions I had never reached on my numerous journeys. The military reports I had received so far on the situation in the north were very few and brief, so that I was never able to form a clear picture of the living and fighting conditions there. In my reflections on the possibilities of my future posting it never occurred to me that it might be in the far north.

I learned that Colonel General Dietl, who until then had been the commander-in-chief of the The day before, he had died in a plane crash in the Alps. His death was provisionally kept secret, as it was feared that it would have an unfavorable influence on the political crisis then existing in Finland. For several weeks the Russians had been conducting an offensive between Lake Ladoga and the Baltic Sea against the Finns and had achieved considerable success. The city of Viborg had been lost; the Finnish people showed great uneasiness. Various circles in the country called for the opening of negotiations with the Russians. The Finns had already conducted such negotiations in the spring; but they ceased at that time without a result, because the Russians had demanded, among other severe conditions, also the internment of the German forces which were in Lapland, a condition which would have imposed, automatically, the obligation to fight against the Germans.

When I arrived in Berchtesgaden, the crisis in Finland had not yet been resolved.

We have in general the idea that the far north is cold and gloomy and that life there is hard and full of sacrifices. So much the greater was my surprise when I heard the general's account of Lapland, full of affection and sympathy for that region; of the circumstances there and, especially, of the friendly Finnish people, friends of the Germans. The combat conditions were, it is true, extremely difficult because of the characteristics of the terrain.

It was also interesting to know that between the Reich and Finland there was no treaty of alliance or any other kind of agreement regarding the conduct of the war. There was only Finland's authorization of the entry of German forces into its territory and the community of interests in the fight against the same enemy. The Germans and Finns did not designate each other as "allies", but as "brothers in arms". "Brotherhood in arms" was an expression known to all German and Finnish soldiers and highly respected by them.

At 10:00 p.m. the survey of the situation at the Berghof began. I found Hitler the same as before. He spoke with the same assurance and clarity as last autumn. On the morning of that day the Russian summer offensive had begun. This, it is true, could not yet be deduced, in its full extent, from the news received so far at headquarters. Only reports had been received of small breakthroughs in the area of the Minsk-Warsaw road.

The Russians had for some time already assembled behind their front two almost equal cash groupings; one was on both sides of the above-mentioned road, about 150 kilometers from Warsaw; the other, east of Rumania, behind their front on the Dniester. Behind the German front east of Warsaw there were no reserves; each of the Divisions had a front of about 15 kilometers. The mass of the reserves on the eastern front, a certain number of infantry and armored Divisions, was in Rumania. It was not to be supposed that the Russians would attack simultaneously in both regions. It was therefore necessary to answer the question as to which region the Russian attack would take place.

At that time the Allies, who had landed in France, were still in a difficult situation on their narrow beachhead. A Russian relief offensive should, for that reason, try to obtain an early operational success. The offensive against the center was presented with an operational objective of the importance of Warsaw, at a distance within reach. In the south there were, of course, also attractive targets, such as the Ploesti oilfields, then Bucharest and finally Budapest. But these targets were located at a considerable distance, and it was necessary to overcome strong natural obstacles and numerous troops, all of which also required a lot of time. We, moreover, had gathered the experience that the Russians, both operationally and tactically, were preferably directed against the parties recognized as weak and only very rarely against the strong ones. From all this it seemed to me obligatory to conclude that the next Russian offensive had to be expected east of Warsaw.

Hitler considered that the Russian center of gravity was in the south and saw in the Russian attacks east of Warsaw only a demonstration. It was, evidently, an erroneous assessment, as was the case with the This was also demonstrated by subsequent events. He forbade bringing reserves from the south into the Warsaw region. I want to anticipate here the chronological account and express that, after the study of the situation, I asked Colonel General Jodl how he could admit such an assessment of the situation. He replied:

"We fought with the Führer for two days. When he had exhausted his arguments, he said to us: "Leave me. I trust my feelings. What can you do under such conditions?"

Here a special and characteristic aspect of Hitler's character was revealed which, because it found no counterweights, grew more and more pronounced. To the intuitive appreciation of the situation he gave a very heavy weight as a basis for decisions. There is no doubt that in both political and military leadership one cannot proceed without intuition, because the foundations on which a decision must be made are hardly ever certain, and are often completely unknown. The capacity of intuition is for the political and military leader an indispensable quality and is also of inestimable value; but, entering into action when the preconditions for intellectual reflection no longer exist, it is removed from the control of reason. And, for this reason, it can also be a dangerous source of errors and mistakes.

Hitler's intense appreciation of intuition must date back to the time when he was concerned only with politics. But it is indisputable that in him it was increased and strengthened by the decisive military successes

which he could attribute to his intuition. Here I will only mention the resolution to shift the center of gravity of the offensive in the west in the year 1940 from the right wing to the center, without which success could not have been achieved, since the maintenance of the old plan would have led to a frontal clash in Belgium; I will also cite the salvation of the army in the winter battle in Russia in 1941 by the resolution to stay in the places reached. Hitler took both resolutions against the opinion of his competent collaborators. Also the favorable experiences which Hitler gathered in many cases with an intuitive procedure, caused him to value intuition to an even greater extent, placing it in the foreground, often accompanied by an ever lower estimate of sober reflection; this gave rise to the most serious errors.

Like many others, I was often concerned to obtain some clarity about the military phase of the "Hitler problem". I had some opportunities to form a personal judgment: I saw and heard him in various situation studies which shed much light on his characteristics; when he imparted to me the tasks I was to fulfill, I lived with essential aspects of his personality. I spoke with almost all the important people around him and often also with some who had only occasional contact with him. I heard their opinions, often contradictory, even with regard to an event that was precisely unfolding.

Most of the opinions were of unfavorable criticism, especially when in the military field it was a question of interventions in details of driving at the front, recognized as ill-advised. When, on one occasion, I asked his closest collaborators if it was not possible to find a remedy for this problem, I received as an answer a shrug of the shoulders expressing hopeless helplessness. It was no secret that no one had a relationship of trust and friendship with Hitler and that, given his nature, and the prevailing circumstances, such a relationship could not come about either. Perhaps this is an unavoidable imposition resulting from the situation of occupying the highest echelon of power, which does not recognize any authority over it, and is not accountable to anyone and does not want to be accountable to anyone. In the picture of Caesar and Napoleon there is also no place for the friend or trusted adviser. Thus, around Hitler there was a "no man's land", which no person could cross completely. But also for Hitler there was in his relationship to men a "no man's land" into which he too could not penetrate. All this led to the fact that he was not accessible to the advice and opinions of others, in large and small matters, not even in strictly military matters. I was also aware of his disillusionment with the inadequacy of Göring and his great Himmler's distrust.

One person with whom Hitler always conversed with great pleasure and whom, according to the opinion of his entourage, he had taken a manifest liking, was the late General von Glaise-Hors-tenau, at that time "German general to the Croatian government," who had been trained in the Austrian-Hungarian General Staff. Whenever he was at headquarters, Hitler would invite him and a small group to lunch with him. According to Glaise's account, Hitler then expressed himself quite spontaneously and did not hide his opinions about men in general and about some people in particular. I saw Glaise for the last time when in the spring of 1944 he visited me in southern Serbia. He had been shortly before at the Führer's headquarters. In our conversation he described Hitler as a man who had searched unsuccessfully for a partner. At first he thought he had found him in Mussolini. Glaise repeated to me a statement of Hitler's that he had never been able to become really intimate with Mussolini, because he always suspected him of mental reservations and because Mussolini, when he left his big words and gestures, always wanted something. As his contempt for men, also for party officials, increased, he became more and more isolated from the world. Once, on the occasion of a case of corruption in the party, he called selfishness the main motor of men's actions. He knew the greed, corruption and inadequacy of some high and petty party officials. In this regard he expressed to Glaise:

"During the war nothing fundamental I can do against that. I must always count on treachery. Those men, however, are bound to me by their interests. But, wait for it, after the war will come the iron broom."

The features of the picture I had formed of Hitler's idiosyncrasies in the military aspect, presented themselves to me anew as I saw him during the study of the situation in the east and heard him in his evidently erroneous appreciation of it. He stood in the center of the broad side of the table on which the cards were spread and around which the staff officers and the liaison organs of other high authorities were gathered. A few

officers gave brief reports relating to the situation or answered in the most terse form the questions addressed to them by Hitler. Hitler expressed his opinion on each of the questions and resolved. There was no exchange of ideas.

The study of the situation in the east was followed by that of the situation in Finland. At the initiation, Hitler entrusted me with the command of the 20th Mountain Army. After an overview of the development of the situation in Finland, he said in substance. The Finns are politically and militarily in a difficult situation because of the Russian offensive. Above all, they cannot master the Russian tanks. The 122nd Infantry Division and a certain number of assault gun brigades have been placed at their disposal, part of which has already reached the combat zone and part of which is landing in southern Finland. "Tell Marshal Mannerheim," he charged me, "that I will give him as much help as possible.

He then expressed his conviction that the Russian offensive would be paralyzed, all the more so as it was leading to increasingly difficult terrain, especially for the tanks. The military setbacks had far-reaching repercussions on the political situation. The peace party had emerged in a powerful form and demanded an armistice offer to the Russians. If it prevailed, it would mean practically the end of Finland. In spite of the English and Swedish propaganda, which worked under high pressure, and the feverish activity of the extreme left-wing parties in Finland, there was the prospect that the crisis would be solved. Mannerheim's report to Parliament on the possibility of continuing the struggle would be decisive. Parliament was due to meet the next day or the day after. The news of Colonel General Dietl's death could have an unfavorable influence, and should not be made known prematurely.

Even if the crisis in Finland were to be resolved, the situation would continue to be more difficult than before. Finland was now for us perhaps the most important area in Europe. Finland and Norway were the only regions of Europe in which Russia and the Anglo-Americans could shake hands. A flank attack from the north would dispute or seriously threaten the Baltic Sea, the only sea which we dominated and which was indispensable to us for navy training and experience purposes. The Kolosjoki mine in northern Lapland was, after the loss of the Russian mines, our only source of nickel; its yield amounted to 5% of world production. Hitler concluded by saying:

"For these reasons you should keep Lapland. You are transferred to the most exposed position. Your mission requires, to the utmost extent, energy and circumspection. By entrusting you with the 20th Mountain Army, you assume command of the best army I can give you. It is composed, preferably, of mountain units; they are all tough fighters, battle-tested. Up there, you will find many fellow provincials".

My arrival in Helsinki was to take place shortly after the political situation had been clarified; I was instructed to fly first to Königsberg on the 25th and, in the evening of that day, to ask for new directives by telephone. As I was not due in Königsberg until the evening, I flew via Vienna, where, after a long absence, I was able to spend a few hours with my people.

The flight from Vienna to the capital of East Prussia took three hours. As beautiful as the flight from Salzburg to Vienna along the edge of the Alps was, it was monotonous at an altitude of 3,000 meters over Moravia and Poland. Nothing thus interrupted my attempt to form a coordinated picture of everything I had been told the day before about Finland and Lapland. The numerous fragments could not be juxtaposed to form a whole, and here again, as on other occasions, I had the feeling that only personal presence and the experience itself can provide a satisfactory basis for forming ideas and judgments about political, military and geographical circumstances as complicated as those presented by my future field of action.

Late in the afternoon we landed at the Königsberg airfield. It was the first time I had arrived in that city and I did not suspect that seven months later I would see it again under completely different circumstances. The city then showed only a few destructions by air raids. Since the years of my youth, Königsberg was for me the city of Manuel Kant. With insufficient spiritual means I tried then to penetrate the philosopher's difficult works of interpretation, and in the following years, with the growing understanding of his intellectual architecture, I enjoyed the pleasure and satisfaction of the development of my own spirit. I felt it as a tribute of gratitude to

direct my first steps in the city, to the places where Kant lived and acted. Memories of his great precursors and inciters Hamann and Herder and the obstinate and whimsical E. T. A. Hoffmann, all of them linked with that city, also awakened my memories.

In the evening General Schmundt, Hitler's chief aide, called me and informed me that the crisis in Finland had not been solved and that the next day, June 26, I was still to remain in Königsberg. I used the leisure time of that day for a visit to Pillau, the port on the Baltic Sea, located about 40 kilometers east of Königsberg and connected to that city by an open channel through the Haff, navigable for smaller vessels. The voyage was made through Samland, that region of eastern Prussia on whose coast amber has been collected since ancient times. Pine and spruce forests alternated with well-cultivated fields. The cereal crops were far behind Serbia and Croatia, and my rapid passage from the south to the north showed me very clearly the harshness of the climate in that region. In Pillau there was a great deal of activity. It was an important base for the training of U-boat personnel. Although the U-boats had been practically eliminated by radar, the training continued with great intensity, for there was a conviction in naval circles that an appropriate countermeasure would be found within a short time.

In the evening, General Schmundt informed me by telephone that the Finnish crisis had been solved and conveyed to me the directive to fly the next day, the 2nd, to Helsinki, and in such a way that I should not land before 15:00. The next morning I received a telegram from the Chief of Staff of the OKW. addressed to Marshal Mannerheim, informing him of the death of Colonel General Dietl and my appointment as commander of the Mountain Army. At noon on the 27th our Condor decolonized in heavy fog and very difficult weather.

As the combat front in the Baltic countries had already come quite close to the coast, instructions had been issued on flying altitudes that we had to comply with, and ruled out the search for quieter flying areas above the clouds. Thus we flew over East Prussia, Lithuania and Latvia, at an altitude of only 500 meters. After passing the East Prussian border with its many roads that stood out clearly and its nice dwellings, it was as if we arrived in another world. Shortly after the German border, extensive wooded areas covered a large part of the ground and the landscape took on the familiar Russian look. At Reval we had to descend to 300 meters and from there we flew across the Gulf of Finland on a direct course to Helsinki. Off the coast of Finland lie numerous small and very small islands, most of which are completely covered with trees. Several small rivers flow there and their earthy yellowish waters run deep into the sea. The Helsinki airfield had to be taken from the west, from a height of 150 m. along the runway. The city is located on a beautiful, very articulated section of the coast, immediately on the sea. We landed at 15:00 on the surprisingly small airfield.

When I left the plane and found myself on Finnish soil, I had the very clear impression that I was in a completely foreign country, whose own circumstances were unknown to me and whose characteristics were in many respects alien to my experience; but this was precisely what appealed to me.

An officer of the General Staff of the Mountain Army, who had flown in to meet me, briefed me on the military developments of the last few days. The most important thing was that there was no acute danger on the Finnish southern front. My first visit was still that day to the German Minister Plenipotentiary von Blücher. He was a diplomat of extraordinary experience and of the best school. He knew how to display a kindly politeness which did not affect the decisiveness of his character, so that, as I could see later, he had many friends and valuable relations in almost all circles.

I was able to see in the Balkans, and it was confirmed to me by people of good judgment in countries I do not know, the harm done to the Reich by some representatives who were not prepared or not suited to their tasks. It is true that there were career diplomats, rather bureaucratic and possessing little energy and initiative. This does not, however, justify going to a harmful extreme in the choice of persons, since energy without intelligence can only manifest itself in hollow, noisy activity which meets with resistance and refusals.

The minister gave me a picture of the situation, which could be considered as restored, due to the intervention of Marshal Mannerheim. He also described to me the Marshal's outstanding personality and his undisputed authority among the Finnish people. Equally valuable to me were his references to the political structure of

Finland and the conditions of the various parties, as well as the most important characteristics of the leading personalities. From the very beginning I tried my best to understand the spirit and soul of this people who seem to be so far away from us and yet, as I was able to establish later, were extraordinarily similar to our own.

From the beginning of the Middle Ages this country belonged to Sweden and enjoyed a varying degree of autonomy. The Swedish language was the official language and the language of the educated classes. The Swedish culture was the official language and that of the educated classes.

Swedish spiritual literature predominated until well into the nineteenth century; but the mass of the people always retained the Finnish language and found, in this respect, great support in the translation of the Bible into that language. When, at the beginning of the 19th century, Finland became dependent on Russia, the circumstances did not change initially; but, in the first half of that century, a Finnish literary movement began, of surprising production and regional character, in the own language, as if the people suddenly remembered their autochthonous origin. The Finnish people had at that time a large number of poets and writers of high rank. The surprising thing is that even though they did not bear the slightest tendency in their works, they vigorously awakened the consciousness of their own nationality in all the people. From then on, the Swedish language was increasingly displaced and Finnish became the official language of the country. In 1850 the first chair of the Finnish language was established at the University of Helsinki.

Among the men who brought about this change, I will name first of all Elias Lönnrot, who collected the old Finnish folk tales, legends and songs from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries, dealing with the daring voyages of the Vikings, with fighting and bloody revenge, with the sorrows and joys of love and with the search for the little wizard jewel Sampo. He published this collection in 1838 under the title "Kalevala", giving it the form of a great epic which, in an admirable way, awakens in us the impression of an action lived by ourselves. Lönnrot traveled the country and especially Karelia, the Russian-Finnish border region; he sought out the isolated hamlets in whose solitude the old stock of legends is passed on with particular vitality from one generation to the next. He thus created a work full of beauty and grandeur in the primitive of the multiform and spontaneous life enclosed there. In every house I found this book that is always read, just like the Bible. The old legends of a people open the way to the deepest and most intimate aspects of their soul. I often read the "Kalevala".

Closer to the present are the problems raised in Aleksis Kivi's novel "Seven Brothers", published in 1850. It is the second classic work of Finnish literature. Here also appear the simplicity of feelings, an unrestrained and wild life, courage, strength and tenacity in the unspeakably hard struggle for existence and, at the same time, the individual traits of each of the characters are highlighted. While the "Kalevala" reflects much of the human soul in general, Kivi's book is tied to the land and is difficult to understand if one has not experienced the isolation of the virgin forest and the fierce struggle that a cruel and merciless nature presents to men. It is probably the most Finnish book of all and is also found in almost every home.

As the third of the books that has the character of indispensable for every Finn, Runeberg's "History of Ensign Stahl", written in the form of a ballad (the original text was written in Swedish), must still be mentioned.

These works have in the village a diffusion difficult to imagine. I found some of these books even in the lonely huts of the woodcutters. The remarkable thing is that these books are read by young and old and that even the most modest Finn knows how to talk about one or another of them. Thus Finnish literature has been a valuable element in raising the intellectual and spiritual level of the people and in a growing strengthening of national sentiment. There was a strong current absolutely opposed to Swedishness. In spite of this, the ties between Finland and Sweden were very strong, even during the war. In Southern Finland almost everyone I met also spoke Swedish.

With the word *Sisu* the Finns designate the quality which, in their opinion, is the most appropriate for successfully conducting the struggle of life, consisting of a harmonious combination of spiritual strength and will. Incidentally, this word is as difficult to translate in its full meaning as Machiavelli's virtue, about which entire books have already been written.

134. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

To most of the people with whom I spoke in the first few days after my arrival in Finland, it was apparent that they had been through a very troubled period. The resolution to continue the war must not have been easy for the Finns; but it would have been even more difficult for them to take the step to resume negotiations, for the Russian demands of last spring were well within their memory. The situation on the Finnish-Russian battle front showed signs of stabilizing. The rapid arrival of the German units had made a very good impression. I saw some battalions and batteries marching in good martial bearing through the streets of Helsinki. They were greeted in a very cordial manner by the population. The foreign propaganda was very intense. The British had broken off diplomatic relations with Finland; but there were numerous private threads to and from England. Very active was the United States, which maintained a legation in Helsinki. The Swedish anti-German circles had in their press, very widespread in some areas of Southern Finland, and in their radios good means to reach a part, albeit very small, of the people.

Almost all the highly educated Finns I met spoke German. Many of them had done part of their studies in Germany or had visited Germany on trips. Almost everywhere I found a natural sympathy for Germany that was in no way based exclusively on the community of interests that had existed up to that time. Nor had the memory of the German help in the Finnish struggle for independence against the Bolsheviks after the World War I been forgotten. The memory of the 27th Fighter Battalion, in which many Finns were trained in Germany for that struggle, was also alive. The circles that did not sympathize with Germany, numerically small, were mainly to be found in the extreme left-wing parties and among people of Anglo-American orientation. To a very small extent they were also to be found in the army, without, however, attracting the least attention.

The day after my arrival I paid a visit to Marshal Baron Mannerheim at his headquarters in Mikkeli. We flew for about an hour over forests and lakes and landed at 11:00 at the small airfield which was just sufficient for heavy aircraft. Here I was greeted by General Heinrichs, the Chief of Staff of the Finnish Army. I met the Marshal in his workroom. He was an impressive personality by his outward appearance. Of tall stature, slender and yet robust; a beautiful head with a resolute expression on his face, cold and investigative eyes, natural, distinguished movements. He was 75 years old; he looked as if he were 60. On his head and on his dense moustache there were still, next to the gray hair many black ones. Our conversation took place in German, which, he said, he had learned in the Tyrol.

Mannerheim's life had been eventful. He began his military career before the IGM in the Russian Army, spent a relatively long time at the Tsar's court and in that war was a troop commander. He returned to Finland at the end of the war and then began to work for his homeland. He also lived for a long time in England and was known to have very influential connections there.

In conversing on political and military matters, the Marshal showed himself to be very perspicacious. He also knew how to produce the impression that his judgments were not formed under the influence of conversation, but were always definite. In this way he also created the impression that for him there were no problems. At the beginning of our conference I conveyed to him Hitler's greetings and the assurance of supporting him with all available forces. He answered me with the skeptical question, "What forces could I have available to me in the present situation?" I expressed to him that the obtaining of free forces was always conditioned by the purpose for which they were intended and that the German Supreme Command attached the utmost importance to the maintenance of the Finnish space; but even weak forces could already gravitate, as was shown by the action being fought. He stated that the situation on the western front, where the Allies precisely had to fight with great difficulty to get out of their narrow beachhead, worried him less. He appreciated, on the other hand, with a certain uneasiness the situation on the eastern front; there the Russian summer offensive was in full swing and had already gained ground in the Baltic area. He pointed out the danger of an envelopment of Finland from the south and the opening of the route for the departure to the Baltic of the Russian squadron.

I tried afterwards to obtain from the Marshal a judgment as to the probable development on his own front; but I was only partially successful. Perhaps the situation in this respect really could not yet be mastered to a sufficient extent. One problem of the Finns was the fight against the Russian tanks. Employed as a rule in small

groups and skillfully led to them a considerable part of the successes was due. I pointed out to Mannerheim that the Finnish army had just received two assault gun brigades, with about 80 pieces; that these guns, according to my experiences in the battle of Orel, were the most effective weapon for beating tanks and that given the tank tactics employed by the Russians, even a ratio of 1:10 to the attacking armor still offered prospects of success. I also briefly sketched for him the course of the battle of Orel. According to the existing news at German Headquarters, the Russians would not have employed more than 300 tanks against the Finns. On that occasion I saw how difficult it is to try to convince someone who thinks he is in a difficult situation of the contrary with theoretical arguments. In spite of all the care Mannerheim took in his statements, a pessimism emerged from his words that could not go unnoticed.

The luncheon was attended by the Marshal's most immediate collaborators. It was a selection of the best types of soldiers, of whom the impression was gathered that they combined intelligence and energy. The conversation soon left service matters. I had to relate a great deal about the Balkans. Everyone knew that in the reflections and resolutions of the Allies, the Balkans were regarded as an area of Russian interests. It did not escape me, on that occasion, that Mannerheim was interested in knowing the nature and military impact of a zone of interests or hegemony in the specific case of the Balkans. As we exchanged memories of the IGM we established that we had met face to face in 1914 in the fighting south of Lublin, in Russian Poland. Two months later, in a serious hour, I had reason to remind the Marshal of this fact.

During the entire course of my visit, Marshal Mannerheim did not touch with a single word the political aspect of the problems that agitated the recently elapsed days. I did not wish to take the initiative in this respect. It seemed to me, on the one hand, more convenient to pass over these questions than to emphasize to the Finns their importance to us. I was convinced, on the other hand, that I would never know anything. Little scattered remarks of Mannerheim, while letting a certain pessimism creep into several of his thoughts on the military situation in Finland, left in me the conviction that he regarded the then situation of his country only as a transitional period from which he did not yet know the way out, although he was looking for it. On leaving Finnish Headquarters I had the feeling that I had obtained clarity, in a direct way, on many questions. The Marshal did not want to stop accompanying me to the airfield.

In the evening I continued my conversation with Minister von Blücher at the legation. I gained the impression that the minister was considerably more satisfied with the solution found to the past crisis than I thought he should be after my visit to Mikkeli. The reason for this must lie in a fact of which I was then unaware. It was only when the next crisis occurred in Finland, which led to the separation of this country from the war, that I learned that on June 26 a treaty had been reached by which Finland bound itself not to enter into any negotiations with an enemy state without the approval of the Reich. The same obligation was assumed by the Reich towards Finland.

The next morning, he still wanted to visit the most important leaders of the country.

in order to be able to attend to my real tasks in Lapland without interruption afterwards; but the state president, Ryti, was slightly ill and was at his rural residence. Also absent was the Minister of Finance, Tanner, the head of the Social Democrats and one of the most interesting personalities, both from a political and human point of view. I met Prime Minister Linkomies, who enjoyed great prestige as a professor of classical philosophy at the University of Helsinki; then Foreign Minister Ramsay, a shipowner, who had studied at the German University of Greifswald, and War Minister General Valden. After a few weeks I got to know all these people more closely. There was a pleasant atmosphere of sincerity and frankness.

2. Lapland

Start of tasks and inspection in the army zone.

In the early afternoon of that June 29th I flew to my headquarters in Rovaniemi, 700 kilometers away, which was in the Arctic Circle. I flew over half of this country of considerable extent and gathered my first impression of the geographical environment. We were constantly flying over endless wooded areas, in which numerous lakes were embedded. North of the more densely populated coastal strip, there were only small hamlets in a few places or isolated houses, surrounded by cleared land. The further north we went, the rarer and lesser were the signs of human life. The monotony and loneliness of the picture made a depressing impression. Later I learned that this view from above is still pleasant when compared to the enormous difficulties this land presents to life, movement and the conduct of combat.

Rovaniemi, the main town in Lapland, had about 3,000 inhabitants. When we flew over this small town, we saw a dense core with a few short streets, around which were widely scattered small wooden houses, mostly isolated and with small gardens. The town was a short distance from a wide and fast-flowing watercourse, the Oulujoki, crossed by a long railroad bridge. Shortly after 16:00 I set foot on Lapland soil. General Hölter, chief of staff of the Mountain Army, received me. I soon met in him a model staff officer, of relevant intellectual acuteness, rebellious to all illusions, energetic, of initiative, of irreproachable character, and who gave proof of high ability in the difficult task the army had to face in the immediate future.

The study of the situation of the 20th Mountain Army, on the basis of the letter and the presentations of my most immediate collaborators, lasted until late at night. I had often had to study new situations, sometimes under the pressure of time. The one I encountered here was, however, so extraordinary that the work in the cabinet left numerous unsatisfactory clears. Already the situation of the army as a whole was not very convincing for one who had just arrived from abroad and did not know the terrain by his own observation. The army was divided into two groupings, which were in Russian territory, some 50 to 150 kilometers east of the eastern border of Finland. The Southern Grouping, composed of two Mountain Corps (XVII and XXXVI), extended the Finnish front and reached the marshy area north of Alakurtti. The Northern Grouping, formed by the reinforced XIX Mountain Corps, was separated from the Southern Grouping by an area of marshes and swampy virgin forests about 250 kilometers wide. This Grouping was with its center of gravity in front of the Fisherman's Peninsula; it extended about 50 kilometers southward to the swampy area and was to defend in the north and west the coast of the Arctic Sea as far as the Tana Fjord in Northern Norway. The boundary with the "Norwegian" army ran along the northern cape. In the huge marshy area stretching between the two groupings in a depth of about 150-200 kilometers to the Arctic Sea road which in a north-south direction crosses through the center of Lapland, was a single battalion of border hunters. The Finns pursued the Russian patrols that strove to penetrate the virgin forest, usually along the waterways. The Arctic Sea Road, which in the south reaches more than 400 kilometers behind the front, was the only link between the two army groups. It leads from Rovaniemi to the two harbors.

Arctic Sea, Kirkenes and Petsamo, its length being about 580 kilometers. On the Russian side, almost parallel to that road, runs the Murmansk railway line at an equal distance from the front.

If one judged the situation only by the letter, one would have to call it unacceptable that between the two army groupings, separated by hundreds of kilometers, there was only one battalion of hunters and that the important communication route was not even secured on the enemy's side for hundreds of kilometers, let alone protected. Only when I personally checked the life in the marshes and in the marshy virgin forests of Lapland, I was reassured about this situation.

Already the morning after my arrival, I started the trip to the XXXVI Mountain Corps, the Army's central

corps, whose left wing reached the marshy area. Its headquarters were in Alakurtti. A short distance from Rovaniemi we crossed the Oulujoki by a combined railway and road bridge. All of the rail bridges are also cleared for road traffic. Immediately after the river begins the forest, almost entirely of pine and in a small proportion of birch, which continues all the way to Alakurtti, about 400 kilometers long. Only around the few small localities there is land without trees, with cultivated fields and meadows. The location of the localities has most probably been determined by the suitability of the soil for cultivation and not by the conditions for communication. Such areas occur, however, rarely, as almost all the soil consists of rocks and is densely covered by large chunks of them.

The road, well built, is accompanied on both sides by drainage ditches; immediately behind them rise the trees of a scree, the pieces of which often exceed the height of a man. I stopped the vehicle several times and tried to penetrate the forest. It was extremely difficult. It was almost always necessary to move on all fours. Nor could the rocks as such be distinguished, for they were thickly covered with mosses and weeds. It is impossible to understand, without more, how trees can grow and maintain themselves, which are also usually densely raised; their roots go into the fissures of the rocks and into the small hollows between the fragments, where in a process of centuries humus has been formed and preserved. The growth of trees is naturally very slow. Thus, for example, pines that in our regions would be estimated to be 70 years old, have been counted here with 350 annual rings. The strength of the wood of these trees is estimated to be 40 percent higher than the wood of trunks of similar thickness in Central Europe.

In the forests of Lapland, normal walking is out of the question. The movement is a painful groping forward and a climb between rock fragments. Only in extremely exceptional cases can this be avoided. Often the foot sinks into rotten firewood or the lush tapestry of mosses and yokes. Even after the trees have been removed, vehicles cannot be moved and neither can freighters move forward. It may be possible, after careful reconnaissance, to find a path in the middle of this world of stones, but it is full of curves and often leads to the ascent of stones that cannot be avoided. In this way the men can move with difficulty, one after the other; but the march and the forms of struggle that the normal terrain allows are discarded.

An accurate picture of the military extent of this landform can only be obtained if we imagine that the whole of Lapland is covered by such a terrain and that, further north, the rocky virgin forest is gradually and in large stretches being transformed into virgin swamp forest and that an area of about 100 to 150 kilometers wide along the Arctic Sea is a rocky tundra without roads or trees, equally impassable. Added to all this is the fact that the region has only very few roads; thus, for each of the two southern Corps, only one road led.

On this first trip, as so often on subsequent occasions, I always breathed free when the road left the accompanying wooded walls and continued on to open country; but this happened rarely and only for short stretches. Soon one gets used to the inevitable forest. After a journey of about two hours, the small village of Kemijärvi lay picturesquely before us, on the banks of the mighty Kemijoki, crossed by a long railway and road bridge and which, to the south of the village, widens to form a lake. Before reaching our goal, we cross the small village of Salla, which lies on a narrow strip of sandy land. Here, in 1941, in the German-Finnish advance, violent battles were fought with the Russians. Finally we continue through the Kairala Strait, which was also fiercely contested in 1941.

The route generally follows the same direction as the railway branch from Oulu on the Gulf of Bothnia, a station on the Finnish main line, and then follows Rovaniemi eastward to the Murmansk railroad.

It was the only railway line in the vast area of the 20th Army, and of the highest value, even though it was of use to only a part of it. On this trip I was also able to see how meticulously the Army and the Corps - which had, by the way, plenty of time for this purpose - had made arrangements for the supply of the units. Existing localities were taken advantage of and in many places within reach of the road, where the soil permitted the construction of sheds and wooden houses, ammunition and supply depots, bakeries, hospitals, soldiers' homes, rest houses, fuel and roofing depots, sawmills for firewood for generators and establishments of various other kinds had been installed. All had been solidly built and calculated for the cold and storms of the Arctic winter. The service operated everywhere with peacetime precision.

It was the last day of June when I undertook my first trip in Lapland. The landscape was at its most beautiful, for it was the season when the sun did not set in these latitudes. A vivid green covered the ground and many flowers, which I knew from Central Europe, lined the roadside. The soldiers in the vicinity of their lodgings had formed vegetable gardens on every suitable piece of land, of which there were very few. Here the summer lasts only three months and must be made use of before the nine months of twilight and night begin again. This was also the only time of the year when the units could receive fresh vegetables, at least occasionally. On this last day of June, hot summer weather reigned. The heat was stifling and hard to bear because the air, in this country of lakes and swamps, was saturated with humidity. In the dry regions of Russia and in the Balkans, the heat is much more easily endured than in Lapland. The amount of heat radiated in 24 hours is here equivalent to that of the equator. It was already late afternoon when we reached Alakurtti. The sun shining continuously takes away the sense of the time of day.

In the fighting of the Russo-Finnish war in 1940, Alakurtti fell prey to the flames and was not rebuilt, unlike Salla. The Corps Command was housed in wooden houses in a sparse pine forest, whose sandy soil allowed for some flat surfaces. This must have been the decisive factor in the choice of location and not the beautiful and romantic town on the rocky bank of the Tuntsajoki, a fast-flowing watercourse.

In the early morning of the next day, we left for the front units, first of all for the 163rd Brandenburg Infantry Division. After some time the road could be used; but then came narrow, rough roads that had been built with much work on the rocky ground. The swampy stretches were bridged by embankments of fajinas. The forest was endless. The positions were also in the forest. In spite of the difficulties presented by the ground, they were well constructed; the forts for lodging protected, evidently, against all the inclemencies of the winter. In that sector, tranquility reigned. The

The men looked good. What they lacked, I was told by everyone I spoke to, was a license and cigarettes.

A road built for supply purposes led in a northerly direction to the left wing of the corps, the 169th Brandenburg Infantry Division. This and its neighboring sister division were the only units of the 20th Army that were not mountain troops. They were, however, fully manned in the mountains and their performance was not inferior in any respect to the units of the specialty. The left wing extended deep into the large marshy area of central Lapland. Little fighting was going on in that sector, as the Russians were working on a road to encircle our wing. The fighting groupings were set up as footholds on small flat hills emerging from the swamp in the form of islands. They were reached by footpaths, where it was often necessary to walk in mid-calf-deep water. The terrain here was poorly covered. The units complained a lot about the continuous daylight, which made movement and supply against the enemy very difficult. The benefit of night, the darkness of which is so conducive to the soldier's life disappeared for a long time in these areas.

After arduous road reconnaissance, two battalions advanced through the swampy ground, which had probably never been trodden by human plant, to the vicinity of the Russian road under construction. The enterprise had been going on for several days. These units, after a relatively long struggle, had just succeeded in conquering a narrow undulation of the terrain overhanging the swamp and thus prevented the Russians from continuing the construction of the road. The danger of the enemy after some time managing to reach the dry ground on the flank of the Corps was thus eliminated. The courage, skill and endurance shown on such occasions by the units hardly allowed a comparison with many other fronts. To all these hardships of life was added in summer, in the marshy areas of Lapland an incredible plague of mosquitoes. In sleeves of millions or billions these small silent insects, very small, rose up and formed on men and animals a dense black layer that did not allow itself to be dislodged. Without a tulle, all outdoor activity was out of the question. When we returned to Corps Headquarters, half the night had already passed. The next day we arrived in Rovaniemi after an eleven-hour drive.

On the staffs of the Corps and Divisions were Finnish liaison officers. All of them, without exception, spoke German and were received with cordial comradeship by the German officers. On the General Staff of the 20th Army was Colonel Villamo as liaison officer, who performed his duties in an exemplary manner. Until the

beginning of the war he had been the commander of the Finnish frontier hunters. Mannerheim had made a wise choice in appointing this senior officer, a true model soldier, as his army's representative to ours. The Finnish Army had great prestige among our troops. The Finn is an excellent soldier almost impossible to surpass. He was unsurpassed in forest combat and a close-range fighter especially feared by the Russians.

The inspections of the front and army installations were time-consuming. In the short intervals the work at the headquarters was urgent.

The most important personality in Lapland was the governor of the province, Hillilä. Shortly after my arrival I visited him. He is of medium height, stocky, with a surprisingly southern temperament and a lively intelligence. The 20th Army Command always found in him the best will. He was a small king in his Jurisdiction, which was one-third the size of pre-war Germany, but had only about 70,000 inhabitants, including the Lapps, most of whom were nomads. There were very few Finns who had made

a trip to Lapland because of his discomfort. Marshal Mannerheim told me that he had been in Lapland only once, and that was on a visit to my predecessor, and that he had not gone beyond Rovaniemi.

In the first days of July new reassuring news was received from the Russian-Finnish battle front. The Russians had shifted their center of gravity, hitherto in the coastal zone, possibly influenced by our reinforcements gathering there, and had moved it further east where, however, there was only little favorable terrain for tanks.

Whatever the development of the situation on the Russian-Finnish front, it was necessary to reckon with a separation of Finland from the war at an unknown time. All preparations had to be made, therefore, so that the Mountain Army would not be surprised by such a development without being ready to face it. The disappearance of the Finnish front would be of the utmost significance for the Mountain Army. As the boundary between the two armies passed from east to west through the center of Finland, a right flank some 500 kilometers deep, completely uncovered, would then open up for my army. In its center was the Rovaniemi road junction, against which led not only the two roads of the Southern Corps but also some from the southeast and from Southern Finland. On the possession of this region literally depended the fate of the mass of the Mountain Army. The formation, if necessary, of a new combat front several hundred kilometers long on the flank of the army was impossible, because the required forces were lacking. Thus, in the event of a separation of Finland from the war, the necessity arose to evacuate Southern Lapland and to form a front by relying on the extensive marshlands of Central Lapland, in order to secure the nickel mine and the roads to Northern Norway.

It could also be the case that Lapland would be completely evacuated and the army would be withdrawn to Northern Norway.

All these possibilities were carefully studied and the required measures were fixed in projects. If Northern Lapland was to be retained, the recognition and organization of a suitable position was urgently required.

In no region of Europe, not excluding the highest mountainous areas of the Alps, did reconnaissance have to overcome so many difficulties due to the impassable terrain as in Lapland. The major reconnaissance parties, which were composed of officers of all arms, were equipped for their activity in the virgin forest without roads as if on expeditions, with tents, cooking utensils, provisions and medicines transported by men and, where possible, in some few parts of Central Lapland, also by freighters. The time required for the complete accomplishment of the tasks was estimated at three weeks.

Preparations were also to be made for the interception, at least temporarily, of the roads leading from the south and southeast to the Army zone in order to enable the two southern corps to withdraw through the Rovaniemi region unmolested by the enemy. These Corps were to maintain mixed groupings of infantry, high explosive sappers, artillery and anti-tank units with the necessary means of transport, ready to leave immediately for the interdiction zones assigned to them.

Shortly thereafter we received guidance from the OKW that in the event that all of Lapland had to be evacuated, a position at Lyngen Fjord in Northern Norway would be occupied. Its reconnaissance and

organization were also initiated shortly thereafter.

My next trip was to the XIX Mountain Corps located in the Arctic Sea. We moved along the Arctic Sea Road to the north. For the first two thirds of its length, it presents the typical character of the Lapland forest road. It goes through pine forest, in some parts interspersed with birch trees, picking up the impression of monotony and an endless route. The forest floor is covered by the chaos of rocks, almost impossible to walk on.

About 50 kilometers north of Rovaniemi begins the "Dead Forest". While further south there are many wild birds and also numerous insects, in the "Dead Forest" every living thing is missing. The attentive ear did not hear the voice of a bird or the buzzing of an insect; a sepulchral silence reigned, even though it was a day of sultry heat. Nor is there a living thing to be seen in the rocks, trees and plants. When in our terroir we think we have found human activity, in the forests, in the mountains or in the fields, tranquility that we qualify as complete, there are, nevertheless, in the atmosphere the rumors of an intense life, of which we do not notice, but of which we cannot suppose its nonexistence. We could not escape this intense life, even if we wanted to. In the "Dead Forest" of Lapland, however, absolute silence reigns. Here man can feel completely alone; here he feels the great loneliness of the Far North.

On the entire 580-kilometer route to Parkkima, the headquarters of the Corps, there are only three small towns, apart from a few isolated houses and groups of houses: Sodankylä, Ivalo and Salmijärvi. Their buildings, including those with a second floor, are generally constructed of wood. South of Ivalo, which is about 400 kilometers north of Rovaniemi, the terrain rises to form a rocky massif, mostly without vegetation, the Nattas- tunturit (Nattas hills), which with its absolute height of 550 meters rises about 150 meters above the surrounding area. This hill is considered to be the sacred mountain of the Lapps. From there one enjoys a magnificent view over Central Lapland. One breathes with freedom in those heights when feeling subtracted from the forest savagery and now, as far as the eye can see, the panorama is down there. Here it can be recognized - which from an airplane flying at high altitudes is only possible to a small extent - that the apparently flat terrain presents strong undulations and several ridges of well-marked heights. Soon the journey continued, again through the forest, which in many parts is swampy.

The farther we moved away from Ivalo on our march northward, the more the pine trees diminished and the still more resistant birch dominated, until it, too, became smaller and smaller and more stunted. Shortly after that, all tree vegetation disappeared; we reached the tundra region. The terrain, often very undulating, is covered by pieces of rock that are sometimes the size of a house and are scattered in a completely irregular shape. There are also some marshy areas. An impression of sterility and lack of object is gathered from this region, as well as that of a hopeless desert. It was as if we were faced with an incomplete creation; if we examined it closely, we found that plant life also developed here. In the covered places that have not been left bare by the frequent storms, there are mosses, low weeds, marsh plants and, on the ground, creeping stunted birches, which can no longer be called trees. In the summer this vegetation is very precarious. Its colors hardly stand out from the rocky background. I also reached the tundra in the month of September, a month that corresponds in Central Europe to the end of summer. At that time the plant world shone in all colors, among which predominated a fiery red, of a hitherto unknown intensity. A marvelous carpet of vivid colors covered the tundra, interrupted by the gray of the rocks.

The tundra reaches up to the coast of the Arctic Sea. In the coastal region, trees can be found again in sheltered places. In Parkkima, the seat of the Corps headquarters, where we arrived late in the afternoon, it was noticeably cool, even though the sun was shining continuously. At night the heating was turned on. The small town was a little less than 100 meters above sea level; but the summer climate corresponds to that of a height of 2,000 meters in our Alps. At midnight we went out into the open air and saw the sun which was two diameters of its sphere above the horizon and radiated a reddish light. It did not have, nor approximately, the power of the sun.

cia than in Southern Lapland.

My most pressing interest the next day was the positions at the center of gravity of the Corps. They were in front of the Pescadores peninsula, where it joins the mainland by a strip of land in the form of a narrow gorge. The peninsula was held by the Russians. The positions themselves were on a rocky back about 200 meters high. After leaving the road we had to march for a long hour along wagon roads and freighter trails. The last stretch to the main battle line on the high ridge was up a steep uphill slope. The shelters had been painstakingly built into the rock by blasting. Numerous shelters for lodgings, in places covered against enemy fire, were dug out of the rocky ground and had a roof of thick logs on top, which was also covered by layers of rocks. The command posts and sanitary shelters penetrated deep into the rocky back and consisted of several rooms. The observation posts offered a very good view of the descending terrain to the front, the "Fisherman's Neck", the defensive works and the Russian roads. In the distance the peninsula disappeared in the fog and to the north, at a good distance, the Arctic Sea could be distinguished as a gray strip.

In 1941 our troops had pushed the Russians into this region. The fighting continued into the winter. At that time there were no coats and no firewood. Even the hardened Finns expressed that in such conditions it was impossible to spend the winter here with its merciless snowstorms. Our mountain units have nevertheless accomplished this unprecedented and unique feat.

Among the units of the XIX Mountain Corps were contingents from many regions of Germany; but its core was made up of Austrians and Bavarians. I found many Comarcans, especially in the 2nd and 6th Mountain Division, in the 21st Division and in the van der Hoop Division Grouping, all of which belonged to this Corps. In these regions there were only a few days and hours during the year which permitted observation at such long distances as occurred on that day; but already towards noon we were covered by a dense fog from the Arctic Sea, followed later by a light rain, and a rather rigorous cold began to be felt. The vision disappeared completely. In the afternoon I visited the marshy tundra. In this part it was very difficult to construct positions and lodges until in the end it was no longer possible to plot a continuous position. It was only possible to build company footholds on sections of land emerging from the swamp. Then followed the extensive "no man's land" of the swamps. Combat activity was limited to light artillery fire; in the outposts, machine guns hammered in the fog.

During that day we marched for more than six hours in difficult terrain, carrying out reconnaissance and inspections. The extremely severe climate of this region produces in the unaccustomed man a fierce hunger, almost impossible to appease. The Mountain Army had the highest type of rationing of all fronts. Especially the high fat ration took into account the harshness of the climate.

In the conversations I had up to that time with many men of the units, I could see the great sympathy for the Finnish people that prevailed among them. Everywhere I also heard of the cordial and friendly manner in which our soldiers were treated by the Finns. Never was a report received about an outrage or a complaint made. As the number of discharged soldiers had to be reduced on account of the long journey home, the army command gladly accepted the "Leave Action in Southern Finland", which was a Finnish initiative, under which 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers were successively invited.

to spend some time in rural properties, in farmers' houses or in other homes. There they were very well looked after and tried to show their appreciation for an intense collaboration. This is the best demonstration of the excellent relations between the Mountain Army and the Finnish population.

We stayed overnight again in Parkkima and the next day we visited the most important parts of the Arctic Sea front. Soon we reached the port of Petsamo, located on the fjord of the same name. Finland received this territory from Russia after the IGM. Petsamo was a port used by our supply ships when for any reason they could not enter Kirkenes, located further west. It is true that the Russian shore batteries on the Fisherman's Peninsula made entry increasingly difficult, so that the small fjord a short distance to the west was also used for unloading purposes. Both fjords were intercepted by German heavy batteries and other combat works. The Petsamo fjord was the first fjord I had ever known. This long, narrow bay, which penetrates many miles inland,

is formed by rock ridges that drop steeply into the sea and only at the end of the entrance does it present an area of flat land where the town and harbor works are located. The moving curtains of fog cover the fjord with their mysterious mystique and do not allow us to see, in their slow change, only parts of the majestic panorama.

We then moved on to Kirkenes. Little was left of the town after most of the houses, built almost exclusively of wood, had fallen prey to fires caused by Russian air raids. Only a forest of masonry chimneys remained. The fjord is wider than that of Petsamo and reminds in its inner part of a large lake embedded between mountains of rock that fall almost to Plomo. The fjord was heavily fortified by shore batteries, also of very heavy caliber, and by infantry works, all in rock and concrete. The entrance was additionally defended by mined areas and sea barriers. The almost impassable terrain made an attack from the sea an extremely difficult and risky undertaking. In the rocks on the shore near the harbor area, a strong foothold with cannons and machine guns had been created after several years of work in cavern-like emplacements as well as observation posts in thick concrete works suitable to prevent the enemy, even after their entry into the fjord, from using the harbor for a long time.

Kirkenes was our strongest foothold in the Arctic Sea. It was the main supply port for the Corps on the Arctic Sea front and from here the shipment of nickel ore from the Kolosjoki mine also took place.

The Mountain Army was very well supplied. The Northern Corps had nine months' supply and the Southern Corps three months' supply. The supply for the latter two was carried out by the Baltic Sea and the Finnish ports; on the other hand, that destined for the Corps in the Arctic Sea was sent as a rule once a month by small convoys which, under the protection of the Norwegian coastal batteries and going around the northern cape, arrived at Kirkenes. Regularly, after arrival at this post, the Russians carried out bombing attacks on the ships and on the harbor. They often attacked 100 bombers, protected by an equal number of fighters. The repulsing of these attacks was the mission of a fighter group, called "Arctic Sea Fighter", which in my time could only fly 31 planes. Despite this inferiority, more than 70 Russian planes were always shot down. During my command in Lapland not a single ship was lost and only one aviator fell. After the arrival of a convoy, bets were made all over Finland and even further afield on the number of planes that would be shot down in the aviation attack on the ships.

The next day's planned visit to the Varanger peninsula, located north of Kirkenes, on the other side of a large fjord and covering an area of about 8,000 square kilometers, was suspended, as urgent work called me back to HQ. On the return trip I inspected the Kolosjoki nickel mine, located not far south of Kirkenes. Here very complete security and anti-aircraft defense measures had been adopted. The works were located in a hilly rocky tundra. The valuable nickel deposit lies at a shallow depth and induced the erection of major technical works in this monotonous desert. The ore is processed in four electrically operated blast furnaces to form nickel concentrate, which is about 50 percent pure nickel. Power is supplied by the Jäniskoski power plant, some 10 kilometers away. The water pressure is obtained by a large dam that closes the main outlet of many large communicating lakes in northwestern Lapland. It had raised the water level of that huge expanse of lakes by half a meter. Full blast furnaces cannot go more than 48 hours without power lest they become unusable, so the power supply had to be secured in every way. The three-story power plant building had been placed under a thick concrete hood, which constituted a grandiose construction of its kind, also because of the magnitude of the material used. The passive anti-aircraft defense was provided by numerous anti-aircraft guns, including more than 100 8.8 cm guns, and the active defense was provided by the "Arctic Sea fighters".

On my return to HQ some reconnaissance reports of the projected position in Central Lapland had already been received. A choice now had to be made between different possible positions. Up to then, during the whole war, I had never decided on a position which, at least, I had not examined in its most important sectors. Here I had to rely on the work and judgment of others, even if they were officers with war experience, and I had to decide on the basis of their reports and rather inaccurate letters.

The new position had its center of gravity on both sides of the road to the Arctic Sea, about 60 kilometers south of Ivalo; it intercepted west of this locality, the road leading to Norway, with separate groupings and still had a linking section, about 40 kilometers long, to the positions of the Arctic Sea Corps. The position was very extensive, for with its western wing it was to rest unconditionally on the Swedish border. He doubted whether he could hold his own with the forces available against a manifestly superior enemy. It passed through rocky forest, partly through swampy woods. Before work could begin on the position, roads and tracks had to be opened in each of the belts in order to allow the transport of materials for the construction of defenses and lodgings. They were later indispensable for the movement of artillery and heavy weapons as well as for the supply of the units.

With these reconnaissances and the corresponding exhibitions as well as other work, several days passed. We were approaching the middle of July and I had not yet been in a position to visit the western parts of the XIX Mountain Corps in the Arctic Sea and the XVIII Mountain Corps in the right wing of the Army. It was out of the question for the time being to tour Western Lapland and Northern Norway, as yet unknown to me. The continuation of my visits and lectures in Helsinki also had to be postponed.

The XVIII Mountain Corps was supported on the right by the Finns, in the area of lakes and marshes about 150 kilometers east of Kuusamo, which, in turn, is more than 300 kilometers east of Rovaniemi. Kuusamo was the only town on the route to the corps combat outpost. It is true that there were some isolated farms and houses close to the road, as the forest has good agricultural land in some parts and lends itself to logging. Here there were also some fields cultivated with oats and barley, the grain of which was frequently

The cow does not reach maturity and is then left to dry on the straw and stored as fodder. In small numbers, cows of somewhat short stature, white with black spots, are of a hardy type and prefer the woody bushes of the forests. Their principal food during the greater part of the year is, however, cellulose, which is provided in pieces of a cardboard appearance and which before being given as fodder must be softened for a long time in water. The milk contains a much higher butyrometric proportion than that of the cows of Central Europe.

In Kuusamo the road crosses three large rivers, of which the first is about 600 meters wide and the other two 300 and 400 meters. As in almost all rivers in Finland, when a road does not lead to a railroad bridge, here too the change of bank was in charge of motor rafts that can embark up to four cars. It was considered unacceptable that in front of these great river obstacles, with their reduced means of transshipment, there should be forces of a strength often exceeding 100,000 men with a large amount of material. For this reason, long before my arrival, the Army had already taken the decision to build bridges over these great rivers, in spite of the considerable demands on manpower and materials. These huge works were built entirely of wood; they had a carrying capacity of 40 tons and were arranged for two-way traffic. They rested on piles and in the deeper parts of the river on heavy jangadas. As they could not be protected from the pressure of the masses of ice that the river carries, the bridge deck and the upper part of the piles, consisting of two parts, were installed in such a way that they could be lifted immediately. These large constructions, like all others in the rear area of the army, were carried out by the Todt Organization. Their engineers and workers have worked in an outstanding manner.

These bridges had been built in the wilderness. Only here and there could be seen a house near one of the rivers. The technical works in their severe and sober forms imposed by purpose, in a primitive environment that showed almost no signs of human existence, always gave me the impression of maximum isolation and abandonment. I also felt the same here when I came to large bridges that, in this almost unpopulated region, allowed passage over the mighty rivers.

Kuusamo was a major supply center. The southern corps had no railway line to supply it; at first it had to be supplied partly from Rovaniemi and partly from the railroad far to the north in the neighboring corps area by trucks. For this reason, in the autumn of 1943, a 200-kilometer-long field railroad line was built from Kuusamo to the south, which joined the Finnish Central Railway at Hyrynsalmi. When summer came the following year, stretches of many kilometers in length sank into the swamp, so that part of the line had to be changed. The daily

144. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

throughput was 400 tons. This construction was also one of the great technical feats in the Far North, due to the difficult terrain. In particular, the numerous bridges built over rivers and stretches of tundra testify to the audacity of the project and the skill of the builders.

In the 150 kilometers that still had to be traveled to Corps Headquarters, the road continued continuously through virgin forests and along the shores of several large lakes. A lake in Lapland is the picture of absolute virginity and isolation. It is embedded in the virgin forest, whose trees reach down to the water. Except for the few along whose shore one of the few roads passes, no road reaches it and no human foot steps on its shore.

The Corps Headquarters was housed in wooden houses in the forest on the shore of a large lake. The next day I moved to the left division of the corps, the 6th SS Mountain Division "North". The forest floor was damp and covered with moss, so that the road had to be built on planks. The very well organized positions were all in the forest and were divided several times by areas of lakes and swamps. The enemy, except for some stretches, had remained so far away that from the trenches they could not be seen. The exploration and observation of the enemy's most advanced works were carried out by means of patrols and shock platoons, which until then had also been able to prevent him from approaching. Numerous observatories set up in the tops of suitable groups of trees offered views over the area to the rear of the enemy positions. I sat for a long time in one of these observatories, my head under the inevitable mosquito net. In front of us stretched the region of forests and lakes in which the positions were located on both sides of which nothing could be seen. On the other hand, we had a very good view of various stretches of a road leading to the Russian front and of a railroad station, which was within the maximum range of our heavy batteries. After having still visited some points of particular interest, I came to the conviction that our positions were very difficult for the enemy to fight and that an attack against them promised little success.

This visit took the whole day. We stayed overnight at Corps Headquarters and the next day we went to the right Division, the 7th Mountain Division and to the "K" Division Grouping, in which was the 139th Mountain Brigade composed almost exclusively of Austrians, whose units constituted the main part of the forces that in 1940 fought at Narvik.

The road situation is characterized by the fact that in order to reach these divisions, one had to travel 150 kilometers back to Kuusamo, then take a road that leads south for a length of about 30 kilometers and finally take the supply road for these units that leads to the east. Here, too, the positions were in a very marshy region, full of lakes. Otherwise, I found conditions similar to those in the Northern Division of the Corps. Here, however, there were many places where the enemy was at a very short distance and where the fire never ceased. One unit had in a large cage a half-year-old teddy bear. The animal with his gestures entertained the soldiers a lot. A patrol surprisingly came across a bear with two cubs. It killed the mother and one of the bears and brought back the other, which was then about two months old.

This time there was not enough time for a visit from the extreme right wing of the Corps, which would have taken a whole day. The return to my headquarters the next day took twelve hours. I now had, at last, at least a rough picture of the positions, road conditions and terrain in the Army zone; I had also talked to many men.

3. Lapland

Political and military recognition continues.

For more than three weeks I had no personal contact with Helsinki, the political center of the country. The development of ideas, intentions and assessments had certainly not stopped there. The reports I was receiving did not provide concrete data. I had also gathered the experience that reports expressing conjectures or impressions are hardly convincing. The multiplicity of an atmosphere is certainly not satisfactorily reflected in words. In view of this, I considered it unavoidable to make direct contact with the leading personalities in Helsinki.

When Hitler entrusted me with the command in Lapland, I had to promise him, hands clasped, to fly only in case the purpose could not be fulfilled in any other way. I was then to travel overland. Passenger train traffic was only available from Oulu, a small port town on the Gulf of Bothnia, which was the main transfer point for the supply of the Southern Army Grouping. The trip by car took more than four hours. This region had the same appearance as the other forested areas of Lapland; there were only more settlements and the development of the trees was more luxuriant the closer they were to the sea. We crossed the small town of Kemi, situated near the mouth of the mighty Kemijoki, through which some of the timber from Northern Lapland is floated. It is processed here in Europe's largest pulp mill. From the road you can see a large field with huge timber piles, a precaution against the suspension of timber shipment down the river in the winter months. If one disregards the tundra, the lakes, some regions of Southern Finland and the enclaves made up of the few towns and villages, the whole vast expanse of this country is covered by continuous forests. The main types of trees are pine and birch; in southern Finland also oak and spruce.

In Kemi we cross the river over a 250 meter long railroad and road bridge. Here also divides the road that parallel and close to the Swedish border leads to Norway. South of Kemi we still had to cross several rivers over railroad and road bridges. In the small town of Oulu, very well planned and clean, I had the impression, after the long isolation in the forests of Lapland, of having made contact with the world again. I visited some supply facilities and the army hospital set up inside the town in an outstanding way. From Oulu the passenger train takes seventeen hours to reach Helsinki. The track has the Russian wide gauge, which not only allows a disproportionate increase in performance, but also increases the comfort of the cars. The train passes through a number of towns, the most important of which is the city of Tampere; almost all the way through forests. Only near the southern coast is there a wide strip of land covered with fields, meadows and well-kept gardens. For the long journey there and back I took with me a good number of books. I still remember how gladly I read Aleksis Kivi's book "Seven Brothers" and how much insight it gave me into the Finnish people.

The program for my stay in Helsinki absorbed all the hours. First of all, a conference with Minister Plenipotentiary von Blücher concluded that the political situation had not changed visibly, but that the gain of ground by the Russian offensive in

The full development against the German forces in the Baltic region - that is, on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea - caused considerable unrest. The enemy propaganda from abroad had for some time been resumed with full intensity.

I then paid a long visit to the State President Ryti. The conversation held with this distinguished person, with a lot of worldly experience, which extended to the various fields of our common interests and which touched also on several other subjects, was a rare pleasure.

At a lunch at the legation I met Prime Minister Linkomies, Foreign Minister Ramsay and Finance Minister Tanner, whom I had not yet met. In conversations with the Finns there was also concern about possible developments, albeit only in slight allusions and occasional remarks. I clearly noticed, however, that the concern was not small.

I also came into contact with some leading personalities in the Finnish private economy. Here I was able to see how intensively and thoroughly these people from industry and commerce dealt with economic theories. Of high interest was the discussion of the essence of the economic doctrines prevailing in the various states, their effectiveness and disadvantages, as well as their applicability in consideration of the special circumstances of each state. I was invited by the military commander of the city to a luncheon. Everywhere I was able to see again the sincere cordiality that existed between the Finns and us.

On the evening of July 20 I received in Helsinki the news of the unsuccessful attempt on Hitler's life. It made a great impression. In this connection it must be borne in mind that we at the front had to use all the psychological and material means at our disposal in order to be able to wage the struggle. The first reaction was the most categorical repudiation of such an attempt at a time when the general war situation presented dangerous crises. Shortly afterwards I was also able to ascertain that the units on the front lines interpreted this as an attempt by certain circles to get him in the back. In the commandos and troop units there were discussions about the ethical aspect of the attack in combination with the soldier's oath, discussions that always ended with disapproval of such an act. We had sufficient means to investigate the true state of mind of the units and were able to verify the truth of the openly expressed opinions.

Many are of the opinion that a successful attack would inevitably have led to civil war in Germany. The power struggle between Göring and Himmler would have broken out; few were unaware that they had prepared for it long beforehand and for definite purposes by the creation of their organizations. This would necessarily have led to the chaotic spilling over of the fronts and to the occupation of Germany by the enemy. By means of that occupation tranquility in the country would undoubtedly have been restored and secured; but it would have come a few weeks too late to prevent the slaughter of civil war, which, as experience teaches, proceeds most blindly in its first days. The conspirators would never have had the capacity and the means to ensure order. On the contrary, the attempt to pledge their insufficient forces would have originated the outbreak of the full internal struggle.

As my train was leaving only in the afternoon of the 21st, I wanted to take advantage of this last day to see a part of Southern Finland and the port city Turku, of great importance to us, located in the southwest corner of Finland, 180 kilometers west of Helsinki. The road passes through an open region with agricultural fields and meadows, described as the "garden of Finland". We crossed numerous localities, including two small clean towns, and passed a large number of farmhouses. In front of many houses there were hammock-chairs, for which the Finns have a great preference, as such chairs are found all the way up in Lapland, also in modest houses. As we approached Turku, our attention was first attracted by the following term foliage trees surrounding the city in the form of a park and that under the influence of the maritime climate, developed luxuriantly. Turku rises on both banks of the mouth of a small river. The part of the city situated on the height and the rocky steep slope of the southern bank presents a particularly picturesque appearance. The very ancient cathedral on a small hill surrounded by magnificent foliage trees impresses powerfully by the simplicity of its forms.

Turku was the ancient capital of Finland. Especially its university played an important role in the development of the spiritual life of the country. After the great fire at the beginning of the 19th century that left almost the entire city in ashes, all the institutions were moved to Helsinki, which was progressing vigorously and still bore the Swedish name of Helsingfors. The city of Turku never regained its former splendor, although it was developing again as an active port and trade center. In front of the harbor, in the direction of the Swedish islands of Åland, there is an incredible number of small islands, generally wooded and many of them inhabited, which make entry extremely difficult. We sailed on a Finnish customs boat through this chaos of small islands, which have different shapes and seemed to never end.

On the basis of my numerous conferences, also with people who did not occupy official or managerial positions, I came to the conclusion that the Finns were still very worried about the Russians and that they would probably continue to fight if the Russians maintained their last demands made in the previous spring, when the

Finns made contact with them to try to reach a peace. I also became increasingly convinced that concern over such conditions contributed mightily to the resolution of the crisis in June. But a change in these conditions could occur at any moment. It was known that extremist left-wing circles maintained relations with Mrs. Kollontay, the Russian Minister Plenipotentiary in Stockholm.

He was convinced that also Mannerheim's influential friends in England were very active and found an increasingly favorable field as the military situation of the Reich became more difficult and, in a special way, the more space the Russians gained on the Baltic Sea coast. The Scandinavian countries were traditionally an area of interest to England. Knowing that the Russians were in Finland had to be very unpleasant to the English, all the more so since the Norwegian port of Skibotn on the Lyngen Fjord is only a few kilometers away from the northwest corner of Finland. The Balkans without Greece were an area of Russian interest respected absolutely by England and the United States. As a counterbalance to this obvious concession to Russia, it was natural to see in the Scandinavian countries an area of British interests recognized by Russia, even if this had never been openly expressed.

It was clear that a solution had not yet been found in Finland; but work was undoubtedly underway to produce one. Mannerheim's interest in what a zone of interests - or of influence - consisted of, and the special form in which it manifested itself in the Balkans, kept recurring in my mind. One could not dismiss the thought that under the influence of the Western powers the Russians might show very good will to the Finns and might induce them to disengage from the war. Such a development could only be prevented by great German military successes in the other theaters of operations; at that time, however, they could not be counted on.

Serious worries accompanied me on the return trip to headquarters. After my arrival I intensified my preparations for the positions in Central Lapland and various other preparations. Reports of the reconnaissance of Northern Norway were also received and had to be studied. These activities kept me a few days at headquarters. During that period I was also able to visit some of the numerous courses of training that had been organized in and around Rovaniemi. An army, especially one that is so far away from the homeland, which is difficult to reach, is also a great school. The training of the junior commanders and the personnel of the various branches of the service was constantly being completed. Thus, we had courses for company, action and group chiefs, for radio and telephone operators, for radio and telephone mechanics, for constructors and mechanics of motor vehicles, farriers, sanitary personnel, stewards, cooks and several others.

I found here a branch of instruction that most probably did not exist elsewhere in the army; it had for its object instruction in track reading. A course organized for that purpose was conducted by Finnish frontier hunters. Track reading was of extraordinary importance in the virgin forest, especially where the front could not be occupied continuously or for patrol activity between the fronts. For the frontier hunters employed in the swampy region of virgin forest several hundred kilometers wide and deep, between the two large army groupings, it was a daily affair.

The tracker's sense and instinct of the frontier hunters, recruited for the most part among the peasants who live in the solitude of the forests, are almost unbelievable. Placed in a sector of the virgin forest that apparently had never been trodden by human foot, they knew how to inform very soon after, on the basis, for example, of a bent twig of a plant, a leaf deviated from its direction of growth, a small depression in a lush and irregular tapestry of mosses that our sight could not distinguish and dozens of insignificant details, with absolute certainty and accuracy, the direction and time of a human movement carried out there. They also knew how to make the traces produced by them disappear and were masters in the tricks of forest warfare.

For the training of trackers, men were chosen in our units who, because of their profession, were in close contact with nature, such as foresters, mountaineers or axemen. With few exceptions, they did not have the keenness of senses and instinct for nature that the Finns had, but they also achieved very good results. Here one could recognize how the life of civilization influences even the existences that seem to be farthest away from it and atrophies the sharpness of the senses and the instinct of men. The mass of the population has professions linked to nature: peasants, forest workers and fishermen. After wood, fish in the lakes, rivers and sea are the

main wealth of the country. Among the fish, salmon is the most valuable. In the summer months it migrates from the Baltic Sea and the Arctic, goes up the rivers to the spawning grounds and after some time returns to the sea. That is the time of salmon fishing, which yields great profits. In July I arrived at the workplace of a fisherman, associated with two others. In large containers in a dark shed he already had about three thousand kilos of salmon in brine. In good years his catch reaches five to six thousand kilos. He showed some particularly large fish, weighing fifteen to twenty kilos. In peacetime salmon fishing attracts sport fishermen from distant countries to Lapland.

Fish were also important for the feeding of the units; due to the small number of cattle in the country, fresh meat was only very rarely available, and this was almost always the case in places where the units raised some pigs, using kitchen and ranch waste. In such conditions, fish was a welcome variation. Some units had facilities for smoking salmon.

During the month of July, the front continued to reign in the calm of the war of positions, only interrupted by small actions; the enemy's picture did not show any changes either. On the Finnish front, the Russian offensive had been paralyzed. I now had the opportunity to make the trip to the northern regions of Norway that I had previously had to interrupt; these regions included the Varanger peninsula, located in front of Kirkenes and the region of Finmarca.

The trip started following the Arctic Sea Road to Kirkenes, distant 530 km. From there Route 50 Norway leads west to Tana and there it turns in a general direction along the coast to the south. This route was the only one through that country to southern Norway. Shortly after Kirkenes we crossed a romantic fjord region; the road then continued back to near the coast, which is entirely flat along this stretch. Here some fishermen had settled; immediately next to their modest dwellings there were large wooden skeletons for drying cod. In front of us we could see the southern coast of the Varanger peninsula. To reach it, we had to take the fork of the Norwegian Route 50 at Nyborg farmhouse. The road we took then followed at first along the southern shore of the peninsula for about 100 kilometers in length and ended at its northeastern end. On this road were some hamlets, in the foreground the small town Vadsö, mostly destroyed by Russian air raids. Here I inspected the foothold intercepting the road and some shore batteries acting against the fjord.

On the eastern edge was the "Arctic Sea Radio", installed here because the "Lapponia Radio", established in Rovaniemi, despite its power, could not save the swampy forest region. The Arctic Sea Radio was certainly the most northerly of all radiotelephone stations in Europe. In the far north the reception is very disturbed and was often not possible because of magnetic currents and storms. On a small spit of land at Vadsö we saw the iron mast on which the Italians moored their airship before their last leg of the flight to the pole.

On the continuation of the journey we came to some coastal batteries, among them some of very heavy caliber. These batteries led an extraordinarily solitary existence, even though they had at least a link with the world by means of the good road. The batteries on the northern margin of that peninsula, which is entirely covered by an unpopulated and impassable tundra, are much more remote from the world and even more isolated; they could only be reached from the seaward side and in good weather, otherwise it was not possible to dock coastal vessels. These batteries could indeed feel cut off from the world; from a diary of one of them it appears that the battery, during the whole year 1943, had seen the sun only seven times. The monotonous life in the midst of a harsh nature imposed the most severe demands on the soldiers stationed there. The greatest isolation that can be had in this world is to be had on those shores of the Arctic Sea or in the Far North, where one sees nothing but the gloomy sky and the strong break of the invariable gray sea and where one knows that behind one lies the immeasurable desert which no road crosses and where in the winter the most terrible snowstorms freeze all thought of a link with the world.

The further the peninsula goes into the sea, the harsher the weather gets. While we still had sunshine and bearable warm weather in Vadsö, an hour later we were already in the midst of a very cold fog. At the northwestern tip of the Varanger peninsula was the northernmost German airfield. This was the end of the road. In front, separated by an arm of the sea about 3 km wide, there is a small island, one half of which was occupied

by the small town of Vardö, which in former times must have offered a very picturesque view. At the time of my visit it had suffered greatly from Russian air raids, the last of which had taken place the day before. The remains of some houses were still smoking. On the small island there were several batteries, among them one installed in the rock and under concrete, very effective. The sea is always very rough there. In a landing craft of sappers we made the transfer, during which the waves beating against the boat soaked us completely.

We then returned to Nyborg, where we stayed overnight. Here I received a communication from my Chief of Staff about the necessity of my early return to Headquarters. The reconnaissance Both the route 50 to the point where the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish borders meet in the Lyngen Fjord area, where the field positions had begun to be fixed, and the road along the Finnish-Norwegian border had to be postponed again, as both would take four days. I regretted this very much, as Route 50, being the only road in northern Norway, was of the utmost importance in the event of a move of the Mountain Army to Norway. On the return trip, which would take two days, I wanted to see at least the stretch of this road in the northernmost part of northern Norway. We headed for Tana, a small town at the beginning of the extensive fjord of the same name, which opens to the north. Immediately in front of the northern tip of the peninsula that forms the left boundary of this fjord, stands on a small island the North Cape, the northernmost point of Europe.

In the area around the village of Tana, in the places protected by rocky ridges against the inclement northern weather, there were large foliage trees and surprisingly abundant vegetation. Here the Norwegians have established a rural experience station. The area at the mouth of the Tana-Elves, a mighty river that further south forms a stretch of the boundary between Finland and Norway, makes a magnificent impression. I inspected the battalion installed there and then followed beyond the village to a coastal battery, which, together with others, could act against the fjord.

I was able to see the effective protection against the wind that the rocky mountains provide to the small pit of Tana, where there was almost no wind. As soon as we had passed this protective wall, we were caught by a stormy north wind, which made it extremely difficult to climb to the observatory of the battery. This constantly blowing wind had a violence I had never known before. An understanding by words required loud shouting. We could hardly bear to remain in the open air, and sought shelter in the observer's hut, which was so constructed as to permit observation with the scissors telescope. Ahead of us lay a large part of the Tana Fjord, bleak and menacing among the bare rocky mountains that drop steeply to the sea; grandiose in their grim savagery. The batteries at the entrances to the fjord can only be reached from the sea. We were now in mid-summer, what would this region look like in winter? Even though up to then only the batteries on the outer side had fought a short fire fight against enemy ships, the life of the men whose military service tied them to these rocks was hard and full of privations, because of the inclement weather and the loneliness.

West of Tana, the road climbed in steep serpentine to a high, slightly undulating plateau. We then reached a region of land about 60 km. long, the most deserted and saddest in the Far North. It is a rocky tundra, strewn in a completely irregular form by large chunks of stone, subjected without protection to the northern storms, so that there was almost no trace of vegetation. In the depressions in the ground there was still snow, which lasts all year round. No human beings could dwell here. Such forsaken stone deserts, which are also found further south, are called fjäls by the Norwegians. Henrik Ibsen has undoubtedly known these regions of his homeland. They must have been vivid in his memory when at the sight of the Sahara desert he makes Peer Gynt say:

What was the Almighty's intention
By creating this empty and dead sandy area?
A piece of the world that lies burning,
Forever without object, sterile, barren.
Every source of life in it dries up.
The desert could never have been necessary,
From the time of creation it is a corpse
That to the Creator "thank you" has never stammered.
What is your destiny? What is your secret?

150. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

The poet's vision matches admirably with the reality of the fjäls, with the difference that they are not shrouded by solar ardor but by ice and snow for most of the year.

Like a thin thread, the route crosses this region, which is plagued for a large part of the year by violent snowstorms against which all of man's technical resources are powerless. When the intense snowstorms begin in January, this route is ruled out of all military calculations.

The road soon reaches the Porsanger Fjord, in the central part of its longitudinal extension; because of its width, the fjord does not impress in a romantic way and its gentle beauty makes it rather resemble a lake in the Alps, albeit several times larger. The troop units located here already belong to the jurisdiction of the "Norwegian" Army. We then turned off the road and continued in a southeasterly direction, along a bad road that was just under construction, and arrived at the small village of Skoganvarre. There was the command of the northernmost division of the neighboring army, where we spent the night.

In the vicinity of this locality there was a Lapp village. It consisted of several small wooden huts, of an extremely precarious appearance, dark and dirty. Except for one, all of them were empty, as the inhabitants occupied them only temporarily because of their nomadic life. The two old women who remained were incredibly short, almost dwarf, and gave the impression that they had put on a large number of dresses, one on top of the other. The outer shell, made of reindeer skin, was very worn and dirty. Lapp populations generally avoid the proximity of towns and roads.

About 2,000 Lapps live in Lapland, mostly in the lake and forest area in the northwestern part of the country. About 8,000 have been counted in the northern part of Norway and a few live in Sweden. They are engaged in reindeer husbandry and in some parts also in fishing. Their type resembles the Moghul and they hardly interbreed with other inhabitants. Their numbers are decreasing and they seem destined to disappear.

Some officers of my command had the opportunity to visit some wealthy Lapps who lived in the northwestern region of Lapland, devoid of roads, in rich and comfortable lodgings, well provided, almost always under large tents of reindeer hides. In Rovaniemi I was once visited by a prestigious Lapp to whom others gave the title of Lapp prince. His fortune consisted of several thousand reindeer and he was considered very rich. He was seventy years of age, reached me about to the elbow, wore very tight pants and shoes of reindeer leather and then, as a gala garment, a long black cloth coat that almost reached to his knees, whose edges and pocket covers were edged with a bright red cloth; he wore, in addition, a black cloth cap, the upper part of which fell into three large peaks, of which one was red. His residence is in the Lake Inari area and could only be reached from the nearest road terminus by boat, after a water journey of about 60 km. over rivers and lakes. He came to see me to ask for ammunition he needed to protect his herds against wolves in the winter. Several dozen had been killed the previous winter. Finally, in a very ceremonious way, he invited me to visit him. I don't think I have ever received another invitation so honored.

The army bought reindeer from the Lapps to form reindeer sledge platoons organized in the units. The reindeer's great mobility in high snow made them very valuable in the winter for supplying the most isolated parts of the positions, evacuating the wounded and sick, transporting stafetas and other similar tasks. Reindeer were used in pairs or threes on light sledges, rarely in singles. The lower the temperature, the better the animal seems to feel and the greater its performance. When the temperature is 0° or higher, the more the reindeer seem to feel better and the better their performance.

cannot be used. The reduced amount of forage - the most important is "reindeer moss", a yellowish-green plant, which contains a lot of albumin and vitamins - limits the number of reindeer in the country, which is also unfortunate because their meat is very tasty.

Leaving Skoganvarre early in the morning, we soon pass the elegant suspension bridge that leads over the Tana-Elv, which forms the border between Norway and Finland. After a three-hour drive through rocky tundras and uninhabited marshes, we arrive at the picturesque little village Inari on the river of the same name. On the banks of the river, in a charming place, there is a small hotel that in peacetime is much visited by sport fishermen, as there are salmon in abundance. The road then follows the shore of lake Inari, of a great extension. Finally we arrive at Ivalo on the Arctic Sea Road. An hour's drive south of the town, I could see the surprising

progress in the construction of the new position on both sides of the road. Late in the evening we arrived at the headquarters.

4. Lapland

Separation from Finland is imminent!

September 2, 1944: Certainty at last!

At HQ there was news from Helsinki that the start of negotiations between Finland and Russia was imminent. Confirmation of the news of the start of Russian-Finnish negotiations was not long in coming. On August 2, the Finnish government resigned. It did not know the new leaders, except for General Valden, who continued as Minister of War, and the governor of Lapland, Hillilä, appointed Minister of the Interior. The State President Ryti also resigned; the Parliament elected Marshal Mannerheim as President of Finland.

He had long counted on the possibility of further negotiations. Now I also had the conviction that this time a result would be reached. The gravity of the situation for my army resulting from a separation of Finland from the war had approached within striking distance. I knew that the army's withdrawal to northern Lapland, especially to northern Norway, would create the most difficult problems. The expected crisis had reached its first period. Its influence on the spirits was great, for it could not be foreseen what developments it would entail. Naturally, the tension continued to increase, for even when everything had been prepared down to the smallest detail, there is always a long way between the writing down of thoughts and intentions on paper and in letters and their transformation into deeds. And it is precisely in this stretch that all the insecurities, dangers and frictions inherent in wartime actions make themselves felt. The units had to be moved from a chaos of lakes and swamps, as well as from positions in virgin forests using the most unsafe roads. It was also evident that the necessary movements could not be carried out without difficult fights. A greater difficulty would arise in the event that political developments were so prolonged that movements and fighting would take place in the critical winter, a season which here begins earlier than in other latitudes.

All preparations were reviewed and examined once again. I went to the central Mountain Corps, which, because of the conditions of the terrain, had a particularly difficult mission in its first detachment from the enemy. The withdrawal of each of the Corps was to be made on several successive narrow intermediate positions, situated one behind the other, by reductions of the fronts of the Corps, fixed with all precision and regulated in a coordinated manner; these positions were to be maintained until coordination with the neighboring Corps was established. In that opportunity the first great reserves were to be constituted. In the Corps and in their units there was complete clarity about all the details which had long been prepared with all precision. A major difficulty lay in the fact that only a few roads were available and that outside of them movements were not possible.

It was now urgent for me to speak to the Reich Minister Plenipotentiary in Helsinki about the new situation and to gather personal impressions of the developments from close at hand. I traveled to Helsinki.

The external picture of the city was unchanged. My Finnish acquaintances greeted me with marked cordiality. The topic of conversation naturally revolved around the ongoing negotiations, which were being conducted by a Finnish delegation in Moscow. From all of them I gathered concern about the conditions to be expected, sometimes also the opinion that those presented by the Russians in the spring were not acceptable even in the present situation.

The Minister Plenipotentiary informed me of the fact which he had hinted to me before, that Finland had undertaken in the last days of June, by a treaty with the Reich, not to enter into negotiations with one of the common enemies without the approval of the Reich, and that Germany had assumed the same obligation towards Finland. The Finnish government declared, however, that it did not feel bound by this treaty, since it had been signed without the knowledge and approval of Parliament and was therefore, according to the Constitution, worthless.

The German position on this question was made known to me by Mr. von Blücher through the reading of a brief study of international and constitutional law, in which it was shown that, according to the constitutional

law of Finland, the President of the State had full powers to conclude treaties with other States binding on the country, even without the knowledge and approval of the Parliament. The representatives of the German government in June were convinced of this fact, which was conclusively presented in the study, otherwise the treaty would not have been concluded because it would have been constitutionally flawed. It was no longer possible to count on a change in the Finnish view; it was necessary to await developments.

The President of the State, Marshal Mannerheim, was still at his headquarters in Mikkeli. I had no intention of making contact with the people of the new government; I accepted, however, the invitation of the Minister of War, General Valdén, to lunch. The situation was marked by the Minister's toast, delivered in very cordial terms, in which he did not mention in a single word the "brotherhood in arms" which was not customary to omit in any Finnish or German toast or speech. By departing from the usual practice, he unmistakably implied, in my opinion, that there was a conviction in Finnish leadership circles that this time an agreement would be reached with Russia. For the rest, the friendly atmosphere prevailed which made every meeting with the Finns so pleasant for us. Only among the young officers did I think I found a somewhat regretful mood. The talks also touched frankly on the negotiations with the Russians. On the Finnish side the opinion was expressed that the country could not withstand another winter of war. The unfavorable situation of the German army on the eastern front was not left unmentioned, a fact that was undoubtedly decisive in the resolutions of the political leadership of Finland. I gathered similar impressions when I accepted an invitation from the new Minister of the Interior Hillilä, an old acquaintance from Lapland.

Finland's withdrawal from the war was thus imminent. In this respect there was no longer any doubt. It was also obvious that we would not know anything about the Russian conditions until they were put into effect, and that at best. We also had to reckon with the possibility of secret supplementary agreements, the content of which would probably remain hidden from us. Was the occupation of Southern Finland by the Russians to be reckoned with? That was not likely. On the other hand, it was likely that the Russians would impose their right of free transit through that territory, in order to be able to attack the right flank of the Mountain Army, the only direction that promised success.

Another question of great importance was whether the Finns would accept the old condition of fighting against us. In talks with the Finns about the latest Russian conditions held by the Germans at the time they were presented, all of them called such a demand grotesque and unacceptable, so that in the spring the negotiations failed. In view of the close friendly relations prevailing between the two armies, the acceptance of such a condition was highly improbable. The last word on the subject, however, was to be pronounced, in any case, by Marshal Mannerheim, whose almost unlimited authority among the people and in the army, made it possible to hope that he could induce the Finns to accept even this demand. After the separation from Italy, events caused me again to find myself closely connected with the separation from the war of a hitherto friendly State.

I have always been deeply involved in the study of the forces that have a decisive influence on the relations between states. From the history of several thousand years, as well as from the essence of States, I have always come to the conclusion - expressed in the simplest formula - that power and self-interest are the elementary forces that basically determine this relationship. Thousands of years passed before the States made the attempt, by means of treaties, to put a dam against the dominance of force and self-interest in the life between them and to create a greater security for life in common. The attempts made up to that time always gave again unsatisfactory results, for the States, for various reasons, did not always proceed scrupulously in the fulfillment of the treaties and finally no State has respected a treaty as soon as, in the conviction of its responsible persons, it posed for the State, in any given situation, the vital problem of being or not being.

I cannot conceal that at first the intention of Finland to separate from Germany in a dangerous situation, after three years of the most intimate brotherhood in arms and contrary to a treaty which, in my conviction, was of full value, seemed to me a reprehensible ingratitude, the more so as I had in mind the decisive aid which Finland received from Germany in its process of formation as a nation and that the country evidently owed its existence to the intervention of Germany in the war. But I soon realized that in the appraisal of Finland's conduct moral

views had been adduced which, while binding on individuals, have not proved to be applicable, in any case, to states. This conclusion soon gave rise to cooler and calmer reflections. For this reason, if the responsible persons in Finland had come to the conviction that a stay on the German side posed the problem of the existence of the State, either because the country would not resist a continuation of the war, or because Germany's prospects of success were considered to have disappeared, then I could not reproach them for deducing the consequences which appeared to be logical. Gradually I came to judge the events as a phenomenon of nature, alien to the categories created by men, and which follows a course according to its own laws. These reflections were also those that determined my conduct with respect to the Finns until my army left their country.

In the IGM I was once told by an old general that it was not possible for a soldier to be completely ready for combat before the first shot was fired. That opinion I found confirmed again when I returned to my headquarters and found there new problems on which a resolution had to be made. They were all part of the preparations for the case of separation from Finland, with which we thought we had already finished in all respects. Even when pure reason worked as deeply as possible and meditated on all questions, the practice of everyday life always brings new aspects to light and requires new work. Above all, the preparation of additional measures for the protection of the southern flank of the army, our most sensitive part, proved to be unnecessary. The difficulty and insecurity of these measures lay in the fact that they had to be carried out in the rear area of the left wing of the Finnish army and, in a sense, could only be carried out at the last moment. An immediate realization would rightly have been regarded by the Finns as an unfriendly action and would probably have been answered with countermeasures which would have made our situation even more difficult. Anything that might influence their negotiations with the Russians in an unfavorable direction was also to be avoided.

Otherwise, calm prevailed. The second half of August had begun. The weather was still fine. I was to take this opportunity to finally get to know the roads that were still unknown to me. These were the roads along the Swedish border leading to Lyngen Fjord in Norway and the narrow route 50 between Lyngen Fjord and Porsanger Fjord, in the vicinity of which I had, on my last trip, departed from that route to Skoganvarre, in order to reach headquarters sooner. Both roads were of the greatest importance if the army was to withdraw to Norway.

In none of my previous assignments, nor in the following ones, did I have to travel as much as in the Mountain Army. Given the considerable distance separating the two Army Groupings, the location of the Headquarters in Rovaniemi was the only possible one; but the distance to the various sectors of the front was extremely great. The distances to the other army regions were, in spite of this, no less great. Added to this was the fact that nowhere else did the roads play such an important role as in Lapland.

The trip thus began with the well-known stretch to Kemi, then passed through the border town of Tornio and continued further along the Tornijoki River, which the Swedes call Torneá-Elv and which forms the boundary between Sweden and Finland. The picturesque scenery in the summer did not allow us to suspect the high latitude we were at. To the right of the road you see a rolling wooded terrain, to the left the river with forests and meadows and numerous wooded islands; but as soon as you leave the road you arrive in Finnish territory to a chaos of rocks of very difficult transit, as in the other regions of Lapland. At the side of the road there are some villages and clearings with cultivated fields and meadows. Also on the more open Swedish side, a road runs parallel to the river. The further north, the thinner the forests and the lower the trees. Instead of pine, only birch trees appear, then gradually rock tundra in swampy areas. In the vicinity of Karesuanto I could see a part of the sector of the junction of the Lapland position with the Swedish border. The work here was not very far advanced. Shortly afterwards we came to a mountain massif which presented the highest peaks I had hitherto known in the north. The Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish borders meet in this region. The road then follows very close to the steep eastern slopes of a gorge-shaped rock valley. We were already crossing the projected "Norway Position" there. After rounding the last wall of the mountains and turning almost due west, the inner part of the Lyngen Fjord, the most beautiful of the fjords of northern Norway, appeared in front of us, illuminated by the fading light of the late afternoon. At the small fishing village of Skibotn we took route 50

again. There was also a tourist hotel there, a one-story wooden building where various military authorities were staying.

The next day, the journey continued northward, at first in the vicinity of the stony slopes of the northern bank of the fjord until the middle part of the fjord was reached. The high mountains on the nascent side appeared in all their imposing grandeur. The southern bank consisted of formidable rock massifs. In one of them shone a snowdrift. The fjord, in the glow of the morning sun, lay before us in all its majestic beauty; it was a picture which for its power and beauty cannot be described in words. But in that picture I had to include military reflections as well, for starting from the Swedish border the position projected over the mountain mass to the mainland and thence across the mountain in front of us on the southern bank of the fjord. The terrain made this position essentially strong. The mountains reached heights of 1,500 to 2,300 meters. Their climatic, snow and ice conditions are analogous to those of our Alps at altitudes above 3,500 meters. The enormous difficulties of the terrain required the best mountain troops for defense, which were also foreseen in case the occupation was necessary.

The road left the fjord and led us to the vicinity of the Upper Fjord area through a series of extensive fjäls, as the desolate stone tundra is called here. The fjäls are generally open to the north. Here, the snowstorms of the Arctic winter blow with extraordinary violence and create large accumulations of snow in a few hours that cover many of the fjäls.

kilometers. In different areas, known from observations collected over many years, these accumulations reach heights of 15 and even 20 meters within a few hours. Nothing could be done against them with the means to clear the snow, such as plows or snow cutters. In the event that sea communication with the units on the Arctic Sea front was interrupted or the Baltic Sea froze on the coast of southern Finland, a supply road was indispensable, and every effort had to be made to ensure that this road, connected to the Arctic Sea road via Skoganvarre and Ivalo, was also kept open during the winter. For this reason, long before I had assumed command of the Mountain Army, the resolution had been taken to build "snow tunnels" with wooden constructions on the three parts of the road which in the winter were usually intercepted by accumulated snow. In order to withstand the weight of the snow and the pressure of storms, thick logs and piles were used; the width and height were so large that they could comfortably accommodate the largest trucks and tractors. Provision had been made for vehicle turnouts, exit doors to the outside, as well as ventilation works. The tunnels were six, eight and twelve kilometers long. From these data we can deduce the enormous amount of personnel and material required for these constructions.

The fight against snow on the roads of the Far North placed the Mountain Army in front of tasks that were often not easy. An idea of the extent of the necessary preparations can be given by the fact that we possessed 1,500 snow plows and several companies of snow cutters on tracked vehicles.

In the continuation of the trip we had to pass through several fjords by means of rafts, since the terrain of steep rocks in the parts where they began did not allow the construction of a road. These fjords are navigated with large motor rafts that established communication between the road sections. In the stretch from Porsanger Fjord to the south of Narvik there were seven such raft sections, which in total had a length of 60 km. Naturally, it meant considerable difficulty for a unit marching that way to have to embark and disembark seven times with their vehicles and horses. Some stretches of rafts were, moreover, very exposed from the sea. I had to reflect on the possible case that the mass of my army would have to march along this difficult road and even more so in winter. It had to be reckoned with halts in the marches and many other frictions. On this road, moreover, there were some villages far apart, which could provide protection from the weather for only a few men. The return was via Skoganvarre and Ivalo.

The last trip along Route 50 of the Reich once again demonstrated to me very convincingly the decisive importance of the roads for the army's march; naturally, the general staff studied the necessary facilities and supplies in detail. The army had a supply of tents that allowed heating for an effective of about 20,000 men; it also had a relatively large number of "Finnish tents", made of plywood. There were also sheds suitable for

moving. In spite of all this, preparations had to be made for the construction of new sheds and other accommodations. Even though all the soldiers were provided with very good winter clothing, everything possible had to be done, if necessary, to provide the units with warm lodgings after the marches. If the marches were to be carried out in the harshness of winter, they could not be imagined without such accommodations. The circumstances in Lapland and Northern Norway were completely different from those in Central and Western Europe and even in Russia, where there was always accommodation for units on the march. In the sparsely populated Far North, the problem of accommodation in winter is a matter of life and death.

Another concern in the event of a partial or total evacuation from Lapland were the large supplies for the army, which was provided for many months. It was not possible to move them in a short period of time with the available means of transportation. For this reason, an order of origin was established, according to which liquid fuels, ammunition, foodstuffs of high nutritional value and fodder for livestock had to be transported (the army, due to its mountain equipment, had about 60,000 horses and carriers).

August was drawing to a close without any concrete word on the Russian-Finnish negotiations. The progress of the summer gave rise to a very understandable concern as we reflected on the eventual necessity of a march of several months in the Arctic winter. Our paramount interest always lay in whether the Russians would come to Finland, whether they would demand a right of free passage, and then whether the Finns would engage in combat against us. I learned that Marshal Mannerheim, the new State President, had been in Helsinki for some time and I resolved to pay him a visit. I was not unaware that it was very unlikely that I could know anything certain about the conditions. I hoped, however, as on other occasions, to gather some impressions and I knew that I was seldom wrong in them.

On the last day of August I traveled to Helsinki; it was to be my last trip to this city. Marshal Mannerheim received me on September 2 at noon in the same "villa" where I visited his predecessor in the presidency. The beautiful and spacious building which Finland places at the disposal of its State President, is in a magnificent park on the waterfront, on the edge of Helsinki. I arrived alone and did not accept the company of the German general at Finnish Headquarters, for I wanted the conversation to be concentrated on me and all possibility of a digression eliminated. Mannerheim was cordial as before; in his company were only the Minister of War, General Valden, and the chief of his army staff, General Heinrichs.

A natural motive for carrying the initially inconsequential conversation into negotiations with Russia was provided by the stroke the head of the Finnish delegation in Moscow had suffered. My remark that the negotiations would surely be very difficult and exhausting found no echo among those present, except for a few unimportant words. Of them almost the only one who spoke was the Marshal. Whenever he wanted to touch on one of the possible Russian conditions, it was circumvented without touching the substance, in such a way that one could deduce that the whole matter was no longer a problem.

I then asked directly what would be Finland's position on the condition of fighting against us. When, after a long time, I received no reply, I referred to the IGM agreement which we had exchanged at our first interview, when we had stood face to face south of Lublin, and I made the remark that it would be a singular arrangement of fate that we should again have to face each other, this time as commander of the forces. As my words were not interrupted by any opinion I went on to say that my army would not understand that now it would have to fight against the army of Finland with which it had always been bound by the most beautiful comradeship and high mutual consideration and that I could not imagine that in the army of Finland such a fight would be understood. In the end I adduced my most powerful argument. I knew that the considerable bloody losses of the brave Finns in their wars with Russia gave rise to Mannerheim's concern for the subsistence of his people. For this reason I said to him: "But if it should come to such a fight, we know that the Army of Finland and my Mountain Army are made up of the best soldiers in the world. If the two of us were to fight, there would be 90% dead". The Marshal was visibly touched intensely by those words and immediately gave another turn to the conversation. After a short time he asked me point-blank: "Why are you still in Lapland? I had to tell him that a resolution in this respect was not in my power and that I did not know the resolutions of the supreme leadership

either.

I saw in Mannerheim's silence the exteriorization of the character, integrity and decency of this man who did not feel capable of veiling the reality of a situation with words, not even with a single one. The further conversation went on in a very friendly manner. I still touched once more on the subject of negotiations; but I did not find the expected result. I thought, however, that I had gathered enough impressions and certainty and I realized clearly that it would not be possible for me to achieve anything more. I was deeply impressed by the Marshal's words, which resounded like a legacy and a farewell:

"I have always had to defend their troops against my English friends who do not want to believe when I tell them of the cordial relationship that reigns between their army and the Finnish people. I can only record that during all the time German forces were in Finland, there was never the slightest difficulty between the troops of our armies and never the slightest friction between the German forces and the population."

After lunch, which was also attended by the German General in the Army of Finland and during which no topical issues were touched upon, Marshal Mannerheim, alone, accompanied me to my car and today I still see his slender, tall silhouette as we waved to each other until the vehicle rounded a bend. That was the last time I saw the Marshal.

Already then the letter dated September 2, Mannerheim addressed to Hitler must have been drafted. It was only later that I became aware of it. It was delivered in the evening of that day to the German General at Finnish Headquarters. Mannerheim pointed out in it that Germany could not support Finland in the necessary way. Finland could not continue the war at will, like Germany. It could not afford again the bloodletting of last June. In case of a defeat, Finland, contrary to Germany, could be exterminated. The memory of the German brotherhood in arms would continue to live on even when they parted ways, for the Germans had been auxiliaries and brothers in arms. Then followed the Marshal.

"I can testify to you that during all the years spent in Finland absolutely nothing has happened that could have led me to see in the German troops intruders or conquerors. I believe that the relationship of the German Army in Northern Finland with the local population and with the regional authorities must go down in our history as a unique example of correct and cordial relations. I consider it my duty to lead my people out of the war. I can never and will never of my own free will direct the weapons that have been so generously given to us against the Germans. I cherish the hope that you, even if you disapprove of my step, will have, like me and all Finns, the desire and the longing to bring about the dissolution of the relations hitherto existing without any avoidable aggravation. With veneration and gratitude. S.F.: Mannerheim, Marshal of Finland, State President of the Republic of Finland".

When, in the early afternoon of September 2, I took leave of the Marshal, I was firmly convinced that the negotiations with the Russians had reached a positive result and that the Finns, under the pressure of circumstances, had also accepted the condition of entering into battle against us. I went directly to the legation and conveyed my thoughts to the minister. Mannerheim and his companions had given me the impression of men who seemed to have finished with an issue and for whom there was no longer any problem. We talked also about the tragedy that was to result from the fight to be expected for sure between us and the Finns. Then the minister informed me that on the evening of that September 2 the Parliament had been summoned for a session.

I went immediately to the hotel. In the evening my train was leaving. It was not yet 5:00 p.m. when Mr. von Blücher visited me and informed me of the news he had received from a reliable source from

that that night the government would announce in Parliament the breaking off of Finland's relations with the Reich. The long-awaited event would thus take place within a few hours. At that moment I felt as if something unknown, but enormously serious, wanted to take hold of me. The course of events had reached one of those crucial points which manifest with crystal clarity their full extent. Instead of reflections and analysis of probabilities and possibilities, certainty now presented itself. Some people fear certainty because there is something inescapable or inexorable about it. I always considered it as a liberation, also in this case.

In our further conversation we discussed the forthcoming measures in Southern Finland. It was evident that the numerous army organs established there were to be taken out of the country and brought almost all of them to Germany. This, too, was prepared. When I said goodbye to the minister I knew that I would never see this excellent person on Finnish soil again. When in the evening I moved to the station, the appearance of the streets remained the same. German and Finnish officers gathered beside the train to see me off. None of them suspected the events which at that hour were unfolding in the Parliament.

I knew that the Finnish radio station broadcast news at 22:00, and I asked the Finnish liaison officer who had accompanied me to Helsinki to find out its text at a station of some importance which we would reach after that time. When he sought me for information, he gave an impression of extreme despondency and informed me in a hesitant tone: Rupture of Finnish relations with the Reich at midnight of September 2 to 3; request to the German troops to evacuate Finnish territory within fourteen days; armistice between Finland and Russia.

The news of the 14-day deadline gave me a sense of relief, even if it could only be met in Southern Finland. According to the orders I had so far received, a complete evacuation of Lapland was not foreseen. Such an evacuation could by no means be accomplished within 14 days, for the Mountain Army was composed exclusively of foot troops. If parts of the XIX Mountain Corps in the Arctic Sea were dispensed with, the forces would have to march at least 1,000 kilometers, some up to 1,500 kilometers, until they reached the Norwegian border. This required, even without fighting, at least two months.

This condition, of course, had been imposed by the Russians in order to force the Finns to fight against us and also to give them a pretext for doing so. The 14-day deadline meant, however, the certainty that the Finns could not undertake anything against us before it expired and that we had enough time to carry out the measures prepared for the protection of the southern flank now discovered; this was always my greatest concern.

In the quiet of the night I reflected once more on all the situations. Even though everything had already been studied and appreciated for quite some time and the picture of possible events had very often passed before my mind, it was on that night that the full magnitude of my task presented itself to me with a precision and vigor not known until then.

The detachment of the Army Corps from their complex positions imposed by the nature of the terrain, had to be carried out in a fight with an enemy several times superior, by few roads. Then, with the entry of the Finns into the fight, the case had arisen which, although it had been analyzed and against which all the preparations had also been made, we only hesitantly wanted to carry out. The Finns alone, with their 16 or so Divisions, were superior to the Mountain Army by more than a third.

My army, on the other hand, was engaged in three directions: from the northeast, from the east and from the south. Fighting and movement were to be carried out, moreover, well into the Arctic winter, which in these latitudes almost always begins in October, in any case in November. Finally, it was defined that the Mountain Army, due to its position and its lodging, could not receive help from any party.

In this situation it is not surprising that many considered my mission unsolvable. This opinion was widespread in certain circles of the units and worked in a depressing way on them. Later, when all was accomplished, the British radio declared that it had been considered impossible to withdraw the Mountain Army. And even Hitler, who considered many impossibilities as possible, told me, when I presented myself to the Führer's Headquarters for reasons of change of assignment, that he had not believed in the possibility of my being able to fulfill my mission. The magnitude of that difficulty caused me to double my capacity but I knew also that in my staff I had a group of excellent and very proven collaborators, on whom I could rely in all situations and that all the generals, chiefs and units of the army were experienced and hardy soldiers, belonging to the best in the German army.

Not only from the military point of view but also from the purely human point of view, I was very concerned about the fact that the Finns would fight against us and that we, naturally, were forced to accept this fight. The German Army and the Finnish Army were bound by a friendship and comradeship based not only on a common fighting tradition but also on a unique mutual affection. Many personal friendships had also been formed

between German and Finnish soldiers. The German soldiers were well looked after by the population with obvious sympathy and always showed irreproachable and considerate conduct. Not a few Finnish liaison officers had tears in their eyes at the farewell presentation. And now, overnight, the two armies were to be enemies!

None of the reasons that usually give rise to enmity between States were present. Neither State threatened or harmed the territory or interests of the other. Even unconscientious people had to recognize that the demand to evacuate Lapland within 14 days was impossible to comply with, even with the best will; but it was the means chosen to artificially provoke the struggle. It was a fight imposed by order, not spontaneous, without a higher meaning and without an ideal for the combatants. We have to go back to the time of the cabinet wars in order to find a similar event.

For the German troops the meaning of the fight against the Finns was only given by the mandate of self-preservation, for they were the aggressors. I rejected the loudly expressed assumptions that the Finns might not fight. I knew that the Finns were good soldiers and for that reason they would carry out the order of their supreme commander, postponing their own feelings. For soldiers, the order is precisely the supreme law, even if the breath of the tragic often hovers over this problem as well. In the reflections of the previous weeks on the events that would possibly or probably occur, especially at the thought of an active intervention of the Finns, the sentiment always weighed heavily; but now I had the clear feeling that this sentimental charge had completely disappeared from me. The difficult situation as it presented itself at the present time was now exclusively a matter of judgment. I had no other choice but to gamble everything I had on her in order to subdue her.

5. Lapland

The great retreat begins.

I was looking forward to being back at my headquarters. In the course of the morning a greater activity could be observed at the stations than in former times. I was greeted in an extraordinarily friendly manner everywhere I went. Especially in Oulu there were numerous officers at the station who wanted to be convinced that I was returning safely. My assistant told me that it was a great relief when I got out of the car with a smile on my face and greeted those present. Here, as always, I adhered to the principle of never showing my concerns to my subordinates or sharing them with them. The Oulu commander reported that several women threw Mannerheim's photographs, which were in every house in Finland, into the street.

At the General Headquarters I was handed the order that had just arrived, which in its first provision informed about the change in the relationship with Finland and about the requirement to evacuate the country within 14 days. In its second number it ordered that the Mountain Army, maintaining the positions of the XIX Army Corps and the region of Kolosjoki (nickel mine), should withdraw to Central Lapland, so that the access to the sea and to Norway would continue to be dominated. The order then provided for the extension of my powers to the Luftwaffe and the Navy.

This order, which provided in a few words for an operation of great and very difficult proportions, is a classic example, a model, of a directive that only fixes the objective in great detail and avoids, for the rest, any provision on details or measures for its execution and even the fixing of deadlines. In the period of my activity as an Army Corps commander and Army and Army Group commander-in-chief I never received any orders other than of that nature, which left the executor complete freedom in the adoption of a resolution and the manner of carrying it out. But such orders also increase the responsibility of the commander who receives them. I do not know, however, of any general in the army at that time to whom it was not pleasant to receive such orders; but I know also that it was not always so ordered. The good experiences that I gathered in this respect

are perhaps related to the exposed situations in which I almost always had to proceed.

The most urgent measure to be taken immediately was to secure the southern flank of the army by intercepting the roads that allowed the advance from the south. The units enlisted for this purpose were transported to their places of destination. The locations were chosen where roads crossed large rivers or swampy areas by bridges or where the nature of the ground (rock or swamp) did not permit the movement of groupings off the roads. The terrain in front of the security zone was also heavily mined.

The Finns did not put obstacles in the way of the Russians; for them the armistice with the Russians had come into force on September 3. They pushed back their lines of Russian territory to the 1918 frontiers, so that our Division's flank on the right was exposed. Happily there the terrain was an almost impassable mixture of virgin forest, rocky, lakes and swamps.

Immediately the transport to the rear of the most important supplies and valuable material began. As the Northern Mountain Corps was to remain in its positions when the army withdrew to Central Lapland, all available means of transport were to be used to transport the most important supplies and valuable materiel to the rear.

The two southern corps were assigned to the two southern corps. Thousands of trucks were on the road day and night. Also the railroad from the XXXVI Corps area leading to Oulu was fully utilized for the transport of supplies to the port. 240,000 tons of supplies were sent to the Reich alone. Simultaneously with this movement, the evacuation of the civilian population of Lapland, ordered by the Finnish government, took place.

We assisted the Finns with columns of trucks that were making unladen journeys, as well as with fuel. The reason for this evacuation could not be clarified. We had to deduce, however, that the Finns were counting on a Russian penetration into Lapland and fighting in this region.

Because of the time required to evacuate the materials to the rear, the army had to wait a whole week before starting the first detachment of the units in front of the enemy, although there was the maximum interest in starting the movement as soon as possible. In those days nothing moved on the front with the exception of the night transport of material. The Russians maintained an expectant calm, with a somewhat increased combat activity; but they moved important forces against the zones of the two southern Corps. From the Finns the first scouts appeared in front of our interdiction zones. The atmosphere was becoming increasingly tense.

I knew that this waiting also meant a heavy spiritual burden for the units in the positions. But there was no other solution if we did not want to lose very valuable material that, at that time, could not be replaced.

The rearward transport of materials went according to plan, so that no changes had to be made in the time calculations. September 8 was thus reached. On the night of the 8th to the 9th an operational movement was to be started which, in terms of the space it covered, was of very large proportions, which at first had to be carried out by brisk fighting and then continued for months in the Arctic winter, and in which, finally, a whole army marched along one road.

On the night of the 8th to the 9th the mass of the 6th SS Mountain Division "North", whose positions were the most forward to the east, and Division Grouping "K", located on the right wing of the Army and therefore particularly exposed, were withdrawn to prepared positions. On the following night, the 7th Mountain Division, the northern neighbor of Division Grouping "K", withdrew its security forces far forward into position. All movements were carried out exactly according to orders without any friction. The Russians following behind were stopped everywhere by the fire of our troops.

The units of both corps of the southern grouping were now at the same height. This was a precondition for further movement. The enemy was to be prevented from falling from the flank on the path of march of forces that had been left behind and thus forcing them to fight in two directions. Their possibility was given by the many supply and communication roads that had been built in the area of the units and of which there were still numerous in the westernmost regions since the time of the fighting against the Russians during the offensive of 1941. The importance of intercepting all roads stemmed from the fact that the units, because of the impassable terrain, could not deviate from their paths and that an enemy established on a road was extremely difficult to attack and dislodge. In spite of this, the enemy, who pursued overflowing, managed three times to bring forces

to the march path of German units, so that the latter found themselves in a difficult situation.

On the night of September 10-11, the two corps of the Southern Army Grouping then proceeded to occupy new positions to the rear. For the XXXVI Corps, which was beginning its movement on that date, the first withdrawal was particularly difficult, because a very difficult front, which was very difficult for the XXXVI Corps.

The Russian forces, alarmed by the movements of the neighboring southern corps in the two preceding days, intensified their attention extremely, and in many parts had moved closer. The Russians, alarmed by the movements of the southern neighboring Corps during the two preceding days, extremely intensified their attention and in many parts had drawn nearer. They did not succeed, however, in hindering the detachment and the marches, which were proceeding according to a precisely fixed plan. It came to continuous fierce fights, even when both opponents were very hindered in their possibilities of movement by the limitations imposed by the impassable terrain. For that reason, the fights in the zone of the few lines of march increased to the maximum in intensity. In the final analysis, however, the difficult terrain was in these circumstances our best ally. When the units reached the main roads of march, the movement continued in such a way that the rear troops designated for the next 24 hours, already by daylight occupied their positions, through which the units and the previous rearguard were to pass. The Russian air force was not very active. It was very effective the anti-aircraft defense obtained by breaking up the units on the march in small groups, by the anti-aircraft units distributed on the roads of march and by some few fighters.

A large part of the movements were carried out, on the other hand, at night. The gradual and earlier darkening of the nights since the second half of August was very favorable for the troops. Already in the first half of September the night darkness lasted as long as in late autumn in our latitudes. Given the continuous brightness of the arctic night in the summer, the first detachment of the enemy and the complicated reduction of wide fronts to narrow positions as well as the marches required for that purpose at close range from the enemy could not have been accomplished without great losses and hindrances; also the daily withdrawal of the rear-guards would have cost many losses.

Many times, at that time, I had before my mind the picture of the moving device of my forces, of which one part was in position and fighting and the other was on the march or proceeding to organize new combat zones. The excellent work of my staff met the test of reality and every day the high tactical ability of the commanders as well as the courage and tenacity of our units was evident. In my almost daily trips to the units in combat or on the march I acquired the conviction that each individual soldier knew that the success of the operation also depended on him.

The movements of the forces were carried out in the sense of the fixed intention, under constant struggles with the enemy who, at all costs, tried to stop them by means of attacks. On September 14 the first important hindrance occurred. On that day the Russians succeeded in bringing approximately one brigade, with unloaded material, through the rocky virgin forest to the northern road of the XXXVI Corps. Since the attack, because of the local situation, would have demanded a long time and cost heavy losses and, in addition, a stretch of road leading south was available, the enemy was held up only for a time and the forces still on the northern road were diverted to the road farther south. Parts of the corps reached the Kairala Gorge the next day, where the corps was to halt for some time in order to coordinate its movements with those of the southern corps.

On the night of September 16-17 an analogous, very serious episode occurred. In the late hours of the night, the rear guards of the 6th SS Mountain Division collided with the enemy during their retrograde march in the lake region east of Kuusamo. They attacked at dawn, but were unable to make any progress due to the extremely difficult terrain and shortly afterwards were also attacked from the east by the Russians in direct pursuit. Substantial motorized parts of the Division that had overrun Kuusamo were driven back, which, in turn, attacked the Russians from the west. The fighting lasted all morning. The German forces had begun a strenuous movement to envelop the Russians who were now fighting towards two sides. The enemy feared that their road of retreat would be cut off and withdrew into the woods, so that the road was again clear. It was ascertained that it was about a Russian brigade that had succeeded in reaching the

Division's road of march; this brigade for several days had been making an overflowing pursuit through the region of woods and lakes, taking advantage of some natural and in many parts still trackless trails through the rocky forest, making the greatest efforts.

Still in the first half of September, shortly after the separation of the Finns, the postal censorship, in addition to other observations, noted a rather widespread pessimistic mood in some circles of the army. It was characterized by the fact that this state of mind generally manifested itself more frequently in the areas farthest away from the fighting front. There were thus numerous letters in which the senders bid farewell to their relatives, for they could only count on death in the Arctic winter or on being taken prisoner by the Russians. The transport to the rear of the materials and the destruction of a part of them worked demoralizingly on many weak characters in the rear areas. In one letter it was said: "Everyone is running, trying to save themselves and fleeing, and yet we will not escape the iron siege of the Russians".

At that time Russian propaganda also began. Through loudspeakers at the front and by leaflets dropped by airplanes the news was spread that the commander-in-chief of the Mountain Army, an Austrian, wanted to skillfully surrender his army to the Russians but had been surprised and his relief and punishment was imminent. This propaganda fell on fertile ground and was all the more effective because the events of July 20 were still close at hand and were being exploited by Himmler and his henchmen for a continuing campaign against the Wehrmacht generals. But it was soon possible, through Hitler's personal intervention, to counteract the Russian propaganda.

On September 15, the deadline of the 14-day ultimatum for evacuation, Army Headquarters was moved from Rovaniemi to a camp in the forest in the vicinity of the Arctic Sea Road. The Finnish concentration in front of our line of interception in the south continued. On that date we were able to ascertain the presence of about three infantry Divisions and one Armored Division. In front of the XIX Mountain Corps in the north, the arrival of other Russian forces was verified. The adversary in those positions did not substantially modify his attitude.

In front of the Southern Army Grouping the Russians tried at every moment to take advantage of all the possibilities of movement in the rocky virgin forest in order to get to an overflowing pursuit and to reach the marching paths of the units. Against the XXXVI Corps holding the Kairala area an enveloping movement from the south soon made itself felt, which was paralyzed by the 163rd Infantry Division. When circumstances in the southern neighboring corps permitted, the XXXVI Corps was withdrawn, towards the end of September, to the Salla area. A Russian attack from the north initiated shortly thereafter against that area was repulsed by parts of the Corps. In this area there were not only several natural roads leading to the marching roads but also numerous roads built at the time when German forces stayed for a long time during the fights against the Russians in 1941. In order that the Russian attacks carried out with great power in this terrain with a good road network would allow to continue in a methodical way the movement of the Corps and to secure against a flank threat the southern neighboring Corps, still quite delayed because of the longer roads, it was necessary that the whole XXXVI Corps occupied, at first, a position in wide arc around Salla, in an area where several roads coming from the forests converge on the road. In this region of good roads, the great numerical superiority of the Russians was to be greatly felt. The army therefore supported the Corps with the motorized brigade from skiers and, in addition, with sappers and tank hunters.

As in the general plan, once reached the region in which, to the south, interception zones had been established, it was planned to give the Southern Corps a large lead in order to pass through the Rovaniemi Gorge before the XXXVI Corps; the latter had remained for a long time in that position. The Russians continuously made heavy attacks, but were unsuccessful.

In the XVIII Corps, the main task was to gradually bring the 7th Mountain Division, located on its right wing, and the "K" Division Grouping, coming from the Uhtua region, about 120 kilometers southeast of Kuusamo, to the Kuusamo-Rovaniemi road. The movements of all the forces were also carried out here in constant struggle with the Russians who were pressing vigorously. Different critical situations arose; but all of them were mastered. The crossing of the mighty rivers caused me some concern. It was carried out without

inconveniences. As the forces gained clearance to the west, the interdiction zone in the south was withdrawn, starting from the left wing and establishing contact with the rear troops of the Southern Corps and then with those of the XXXVI Corps.

Although the weather was fine during the day, often even warm, the nights were noticeably cold. In the morning, a heavy frost covered the landscape. The first snow had fallen in the north. It is not possible to describe the polychrome of the foliage trees, especially the birch and rowan, as well as the plants that covered the rocky forest floor. Nowhere on earth can there be such a fiery intensity of color as in the countries of the Far North. To the north of the wooded area the tundra "burned" in a single, endless chromatic explosion. Had not Ibsen, the great son of the North, many times contemplated this "death in beauty" of nature before he spiritualized it in his "Hedda Gabler" as a human desire?

He knew that the Supreme Command was also analyzing the possibility of withdrawing the Mountain Army to Norway. It was evident that such a resolution should not be taken too late, for it was to be expected that from the beginning of January snow conditions would make the execution of long marches extraordinarily difficult and in some parts of the country would even prevent them altogether. After this consideration and in view of the situation in which both southern corps found themselves in the second half of September, the decision as to the future army zone could not be postponed beyond October 5. This is how I put it to Colonel General Jodl of the OKM, in a telephone conference, in which he replied that the direction of Norway would be the probable one. In this case, the most urgent task for the army was the organization of the main marching roads in order to be able to carry out the movement during the winter. In the projects in this respect work had already been advanced by the accumulation of various important supplies along the roads, which would be covered by the position in Central Lapland.

A withdrawal of the army to Norway also required other measures. On the stretch of coast between Petsamo and Lyngen Fjord, more than 1,000 kilometers long, there was a very large number of coastal batteries of all calibers. An important part of them could only be reached from the sea and in good weather. The demolition and loading of the batteries, especially the heavy ones, required a lot of work and favorable weather. For this reason it was not necessary to count on the transfer of numerous batteries; they had to be destroyed. Another difficulty consisted in the fact that a part of the batteries could not be demolished before the mass of the forces marching along Reich Route 50 had overtaken the position of the individual batteries, for the march along that route could easily be beaten in many parts from the sea. Nevertheless, every effort should be made to remove as many batteries as possible, as they were needed for the defense of the Reich.

in some regions of southern Norway.

After the passage of the Russian-Finnish border by the two Southern Corps, the Russians pressed only in the Salla sector in Finnish territory. Their intention to seize the Southern Mountain Army Grouping and annihilate it failed after fights lasting several weeks. With the Finns, who had concentrated on the southern flank of the movement, no fighting took place until the end of September. They had here finally four infantry divisions, an infantry brigade and an armored division. Their center of gravity was clearly in the region south of Kemi and Rovaniemi. They were in front of our interdiction zone and were mainly engaged in laying mines. When our interception zone was withdrawn in coordination with the movement of our two southern corps, they also worked on the construction of passage points, as all the existing ones were destroyed. We also received news of the arrival of Russian officers in the Finnish units.

On September 28 the Finns tried to seize the important bridge at Olhava by means of a daring coup de main before it was blown up, and simultaneously they also made a surprise attack on various parts of the interception zone. It came to very fierce fighting, also with Finnish detachments that in extremely difficult terrain had managed to reach the backs of the German forces. All the Finnish attacks and hand strikes were finally repulsed with heavy losses for the adversary.

At that time we came across an article in the Moscow Pravda, dated several days before, in which the Finns

were violently reproached for the deficient fulfillment of the conditions of the armistice, based mainly on their not very energetic conduct of the fight against the Germans. The article provided us with an explanation of the conduct of the Finns, who had yielded to the pressure of the Russians.

Also in case the Mountain Army remained in Central Lapland, the XVIII Mountain Corps had been directed through Rovaniemi to the nearby Finnish-Swedish road, in order to occupy with a part of its forces the position supported on the Swedish border as well as positions in Lapland further east which could be reached more easily from Norway. In the last days of September, the Corps approached with its most advanced troops the Rovaniemi area. From here one road led via Kemi to the road near the Swedish border and another via Muonio; the latter ran parallel to the former and joined after about 100 kilometers with the border road.

On the night of September 30 to October 1 Finnish troops landed in Tornio, the town near the Swedish border, where we had only weak security forces. In this way they reached the border road and intended to prevent the Corps' march along the border road. Division Grouping "K" immediately engaged in combat and was supported by the Motorized Skier Brigade headed for that area. The fight in the rocky and partly wooded terrain was very difficult. After a day, failing to dislodge the Finns, I had the fighting broken off, the direction to Muonio heavily secured and the Corps diverted to the road through Muonio. The Finns did not succeed in realizing their intention of preventing the march; nor did it go beyond an attempt to realize an evident purpose of conquering the decisively important Rovaniemi road junction.

From then on the marches of the Southern Grouping were carried out undisturbed and, for the time being, completely in accordance with one's own intention. The XXXVI Mountain Corps was to reach the Rovaniemi road junction behind the XVIII Mountain Corps directed on the road near the Swedish border and then continue along the Arctic Sea Road to Ivalo and from there via Skoganvarre to Reich Route 50 to reach the Porsanger Fjord region.

Continuous skirmishes were fought with the Finns in the interception zone. The first week of October had begun and in a week the passage of the XVIII Mountain Corps through the Rovaniemi area was to be completed. The Army Command moved its combat outpost established in the forest east of Rovaniemi, and moved it to a small village on the Arctic Sea Road north of Rovaniemi. In front of the XIX Mountain Corps in the north, the Russians remained quiet, as before.

On October 4 I received the directive to withdraw the Mountain Army to Norway and hold the position at Lyngen Fjord. The brief order, which contained no details, was again the only operational order I received for this major operation. The main difficulty in its execution lay, together with the fighting which was going on and which was to be expected to intensify still further, in the fact that the movement would inevitably be prolonged for the greater part of the winter and would finally bring the whole army to Reich Route 50, situated in many stretches in the immediate vicinity of the sea coast, which was not a continuous road but up to the south of Narvik was interrupted seven times by raft services. This service was extended to the maximum possible extent by the use of rafts brought from further south, then by Navy vessels, sappers' landing boats, etc. The raft moorings were sensitive to air attacks and were exposed to action from the sea. They thus constituted a very serious factor of insecurity in the marches.

6. Lapland

Retreat of the mountain army to Norway.

A special order from Hitler later stipulated that the population of the Norwegian territory north of the Lyngen Fjord was to be evacuated to southern Norway and that all accommodation and communication works in the regions left free were to be destroyed. In that region, which was extremely extensive, there lived in normal times about 50,000 inhabitants. One-fifth of them had emigrated southward at the beginning of the war. The evacuation of 40,000 people prescribed by this order was a very heavy burden for us because of the limited means of communication, the station and the other tasks of the army.

In my first reflections on a withdrawal of the Army to Norway I had the idea of leaving the population only the indispensable living space and destroying everything else, because for a pursuing enemy, shelter during the Arctic winter was a matter of life and death. It could already be foreseen that the mass of the army would have to march along Reich Route 50, very exposed from the sea, and that in this march considerable halts and difficulties were to be expected on account of the frequent embarkations of units on rafts and their subsequent landings, of snowstorms, and of possible enemy action. It was further evident that in such situations the pursuit by a strong adversary would have to create the most dangerous crises.

It would have been an inexcusable levity not to count on a pursuit of the enemy. Along with other elements of judgment in this respect, a statement of October 26, 1944, from the King of Norway, who was in England, came to our knowledge, according to which Norwegian forces were shortly to intervene in cooperation with Russian troops. It was thus the most elementary mandate of self-preservation to resort to everything that would make such a pursuit impossible or at least hinder or delay it. In addition to the destruction of the lodgings, this was to include the destruction of all works and means of communication, such as roads, bridges, ships, etc. Even harbor installations were to be rendered useless, since it was necessary to count on landings of Russian or Anglo-American forces in Norway.

The preconditions for a landing operation were also in place for the Russians, inasmuch as in the Russian Arctic ports of Murmansk and Archangel, continuously watched by our aerial exploration, there were in September and October numerous units of their navy and ships with a total cargo capacity of 250,000 to 300,000 tons, which was sufficient for the transport of several Divisions of their organization. It should also be borne in mind that in September the British Admiralty had taken over the conduct of the large supply convoys to the Russian Arctic ports.

All the necessary measures against a persecution by the Russians or against landings were for me clear military necessities that were in complete accordance with the law of nations in force. I had the impression that as far as the inhabitants were concerned, the problem had not yet been studied to its ultimate consequence. The first question that presented itself was: will a pursuing enemy leave the population in their lodgings when it comes to the preservation of his troops? This question could not be answered with certainty in the affirmative. And as a next question it was doubtful whether the population could live if all the works of communication were destroyed. In the midst of these reflections came Hitler's aforementioned order to evacuate the entire population. Even without that order, I would probably have come to the same resolution.

I considered that order to be absolutely justified. I would like to go ahead and express here that it was carried out with the greatest consideration for the inhabitants and also by putting some of the army's interests on the back burner. I recall that the evacuation of the hospitals and also a part of the old people's homes was carried out with army sanitation vehicles and that for transport over water heated sanitation boats were also used. Heated sheds were available at the embarkation points and places of detention, and even milk cows were kept ready for the care of children and the elderly. Doctors, who were experienced in childbirth, were distributed along the entire transport route. Some of the evacuees used their own vehicles; most of the evacuees were transported in

army vehicles. Young people also marched on foot with the units.

The population of the Varanger peninsula and the Kirkenes area objected to an evacuation by sea from the port of Kirkenes, as the ships were exposed to great danger from Russian aviators and fast boats from Murmansk. I then prohibited evacuation by sea from Kirkenes.

Food distribution sites set up along Route 50 provided ample food for the transports. A Norwegian marching on foot related that one day he received three times the full daily ration, because at every food place he reached he was given a full ration. I myself have seen several transports when inspecting the facilities on the Reich Route and was satisfied with the scrupulousness and care with which all measures had been taken for the evacuees.

All this was in response to my order for the evacuation of the inhabitants, the final paragraph of which read: "I instruct all participating authorities to carry out this evacuation as an action to help the Norwegian population. No German who has been evacuated inland or abroad has ever been subjected to such care. It has been reliably established that no Norwegian has ever lost his life through evacuation. Upon arrival in the Tromsø area, south of the Lyngen Fjord, the evacuees were no longer under the care of the Mountain Army and were placed under the responsibility of the Reich Commissar for Norway.

Some groups of villagers who had escaped the evacuation by hiding, later found themselves in a difficult situation, as was the case for example in the Kirkenes area. After the withdrawal of the troops they found neither shelter nor subsistence and were found in a deplorable state by patrols sent to the area by the Norwegian government in exile. But the situation in which they found themselves must be attributed to their own resolution. They were warned in a very clear way. The Swedish press also reported on a group of young Norwegians who, with very inadequate equipment, were found frozen in the deep snow on the Norwegian-Swedish border mountain range. In these cases it was people who wanted to evade evacuation and reach Sweden at their own risk. The Mountain Army therefore had no responsibility for them. This did not prevent several newspapers from taking advantage of the pitiful state of these victims of their own thoughtlessness to start a campaign of agitation.

I anticipate events by stating that in part of the press, mainly Swedish, the evacuation was the object of an intense campaign of defamation against the Mountain Army and against me. Among the most senseless assertions was that sick people were burned with their houses. As soon as such charges could be traced, they were immediately preceded by investigation, in several cases also judicially. They always turned out to be false.

The lesser reproach consisted in the fact that in various remote regions the settlers were given too little time to prepare their belongings. This concerned the evacuation of small islands or remote villages. The reasons were to be found in the conditions of light and time and, in the case of collective transport, in the impossibility. The people who had already embarked had to wait too long because of the prevailing cold. Moreover, the population had already been informed of the imminent evacuation by radio and posters, as well as by troop units and the Norwegian administration.

Given the very friendly relations between the population and the troops, which were known to me, it was to be considered improbable that avoidable harshness would have been proceeded with. The newspaper reports were believed by a part of the population in Norway and abroad and achieved their purpose of stirring up opinion against Germany. It is likely that they are still believed today. We have here a typical case of the hate-creating action between peoples by an unscrupulous press.

For the first time I personally felt the disgust caused by the conscious lie, which has the appropriate means of publicity. Against the torrent of false and unworthy assertions I had at first the feeling of helplessness, which came to me with crystal clarity, especially since there was no other means available against the charges than a response that would rectify the facts. Unfortunately, this could not come from me. The OKW did not see fit to deal publicly with this matter because the operation that was going on could not be left unmentioned. I also gained the experience that unjustified, propaganda attacks gradually lose their effectiveness and that the best

thing to do is to oppose them with the contempt that this low form of journalism deserves. After the war I also followed this rule of conduct.

After the order of 4 October it was evident that the Army's withdrawal to Norway was to be prolonged for the greater part of the Nordic winter and that the troops were to undertake marches of more than a thousand kilometers in length. The organization of Reich Route 50 and that of the road from Ivalo to Porsanger Fjord had to meet, in every respect, the needs of the troops during this march and was carried out with the employment of all available forces and means of transport. It was already completed at the beginning of the evacuation. As there were only a few towns on Reich Route 50 situated at great intervals between them, mileposts were set up in order that the places could be located; these posts were placed at the sides of the road and were of great use for orders and parties. In a surprisingly short time, accommodations and all the facilities required for the life of the units were erected along the road. A real feat was accomplished in this respect.

This work, as well as the supplying of troops and the rear transport of road material, was the work of the Army's master chief of staff, Colonel Diermeyer and his staff. Everyone using the road had to have a clear idea of the facilities and their locations; to that end, every unit and every truck driver received a schematic showing Route 50 with its mileposts. Next to the mileage indicator there were signs, the reference of which was shown in a legend: places of delivery of supplies or ammunition, motor vehicle workshop, mechanical aid service, places of delivery of fuel or tires, hospital, place of assembly of horses, heating material, snow-cleaning detachment and the like.

For the regulation of traffic, a special communications network was established with telephone posts every 5 to 10 kilometers and radio stations every 30 to 50 kilometers. 300 officers and 2 motorized battalions were employed in the service of regulation and surveillance of the traffic on the road as well as in giving and transmitting orders to the units on the move and for the transmission of their parts.

Shortly after the order of October 4, I received the information that after completion of the withdrawal of the Mountain Army to Norway I was to assume command in chief over all Norwegian forces. The hitherto "Norwegian" Army was to be incorporated into the 20th Mountain Army. It was evident that after the evacuation of Lapland and Finmark, forces would be free for transport to the mainland. At that time I was also informed that I was to

I was to hand over the 6th SS Mountain Division, the first to reach Norway, and that it was to continue the march to Oslo. I knew little about the circumstances in Norway; until then, because of the accumulation of work, I would not yet have enough time to think carefully about the tasks that awaited me.

While the southern Army Grouping had been on the march westward for several weeks and the Finnish attacks to disrupt this movement were always repulsed, in the north in the XIX Mountain Corps a relative calm continued to reign as before. Only the approach of Russian forces continued at a very short distance from the front. In the first days of October the picture obtained by the captured enemy radiograms allowed to deduce the concentration of important enemy forces in the area of Lutta, to the south of Murmansk. This concentration could be interpreted to mean that the Russians intended to attack in the direction of Ivalo, located on the Arctic Sea road. The picture obtained from the radiograms showed too schematic a device; moreover, an advance from Lutta on Ivalo was improbable because of the terrain, so neither the Corps nor the Army took any countermeasures. Later it turned out to be, indeed, an attempt at deception.

In the evening of October 6, various movements and a great unrest in the Russian positions made it possible to deduce the imminence of an attack against the XIX Mountain Corps. On the morning of October 7, the long-awaited attack against the front, formed by support points, of the 2nd Mountain Division began with great power. Various footholds were overpowered by the enemy after heavy fighting. The brave Division formed a new front on the Petsamonjoki, for the possession of which it fought during the 8th and 9th. The Russians, in spite of the difficult terrain, were able to make their great numerical superiority felt. Although the rocky tundra terrain made it very difficult to conduct attacks, it was also very unfavorable for the defender, since it extremely hindered the rapid movement and use of his reserves, which are two of the most important means of defense.

As there was no intention to conduct a decision-seeking defense, employing all forces and means to the utmost, but in all sectors only to hold the front until the withdrawal of all Corps units in mutual cooperation could be effected, those parts of the Corps which were on the Liza to the north of the fighting being waged, were withdrawn on the night of October 8-9, behind the Titowka, a river which flows into the Arctic Sea immediately east of the so-called "Fisherman's Neck."

The Russians tried simultaneously, by means of two attacks launched from the north and from the south, to take by the backs the main force of the Corps, which formed a very pronounced salient to the east, holding it by strong frontal attacks in order to prevent it from moving its forces towards the threatened directions. In the north they attacked with numerous forces on the western side of the "Fisherman's Neck" and made at the same time a landing between the "Fisherman's Neck" and the Petsamo Fjord. The landing and the attacks were repulsed after day-long fights.

In the south, the Russians launched with far superior forces a new large-scale attack against the area of the 2nd Mountain Division with the aim of reaching the bend in the Arctic Sea road leading from there northward to Petsamo, directly on the backs of the Corps mass and from which a road also leads westward to the Kirkenes area. In this way the direction to Ivalo was also threatened. The Russians also employed tanks here, which often intervened very effectively, taking advantage of the numerous roads and tracks behind the former front area. For the Corps it was of vital importance that the enemy did not succeed in realizing his intention. The army intervened to their aid in-

The "Norwegian" Cyclist Brigade which, coming from Norway, had arrived on the Arctic Sea Road at Ivalo, and then motorized parts of the 6th SS Mountain Division to the area of the 2nd Mountain Division. Then the Motorized Ski Brigade which, 600 kilometers away, was involved in securing the road to Muonio, northwest of Rovaniemi, was relieved and also sent to the XIX Mountain Corps.

The situation in the corps was quite difficult and for this reason I personally moved there on October 10. The development of the fighting during the day showed that the relatively weak troops sent as reinforcements did not possess sufficient fighting power to offer a suitably long resistance to the Russian attack. Decisive in this assessment was the fact that the fighting had gradually reached a terrain that appeared to be more passable and thus allowed the enemy to make his numerical superiority more felt.

The danger of a Russian breakthrough in the direction of Salmijärvi and then Ivalo on the Arctic Sea Road was finally becoming manifest. If the Russians succeeded in this attack, not only would the entire Arctic Sea front be greatly endangered, but also the situation of the XXXVI Mountain Corps would become desperate, for it had to reach the Reich Route 50 via the Arctic Sea Road and the Ivalo Gorge. This Corps could not reach the Ivalo area before a few weeks.

This situation therefore called for an energetic resolution, the successful completion of which was to be of decisive importance for the further development of the entire Mountain Army operation. It was unavoidable to bring a large force to the area east of Salmijärvi. But all units were engaged in fighting and the Army Command had no reserves. I finally resolved to obtain the required forces by drawing them from the XXXVI Corps itself, which was engaged in violent fighting. I ordered that the 163rd Infantry Division of this Corps be immediately withdrawn from the front and transported, using all available trucks, along the 600 kilometer stretch from Longitude to Salmijärvi at the disposal of the XIX Mountain Corps. The XXXVI Mountain Corps was to break off the fighting in Salla, even if this was a few days before the scheduled date. The Corps and its units performed all this with great skill and the Division was soon free. The gain of ground by the Russians in front of the 2nd Mountain Division created the danger of an envelopment of the XIX Mountain Corps mass from the south. I approved for this reason the proposal of the commanding general of this Corps to withdraw the mass of his troops still in the afternoon of the 10th and in the night of the 10th to the 11th to the area west of Petsamo.

The rapid transport of the 163rd Infantry Division to the front was a masterpiece of improvisation, carried out by my staff and all the participating units, baggage and supply units. Thousands of trucks carrying out material transports proceeded to unload it at assembly points and were concentrated from hundreds of

kilometers away in a very short time, to which had to be added the exceptional difficulty represented by the fact that the concentration of the vehicles and the embarkation of the troops had to be done for the most part on the only road, since in the area of the Corps there were only different small flat places on its side. All the units were embarked on foot with their vehicles and horses as well as the artillery personnel and livestock. The pieces were attached to the heavy trucks, which seemed feasible given the elastic condition of the Arctic Sea road. Simultaneously with the assembly of the vehicles, a heavy traffic regulation service, a fuel distribution service and a mechanical relief service were organized along the Arctic Sea Road.

Thus the improbable happened, that six hours after I had given the order to move the 163rd Infantry Division, its unpledged units and those that were detached in the first instance were already being transported. When I received that report, I knew that it would be possible to save the dangerous crisis that was occurring in the army.

In each of the steps of management, from the lowest to the highest, improvisation acquires a special value because it is often the only choice. Experience has shown that, first of all, the fundamental thoughts for the use of such a device must be correct. Mistakes in this respect can only be corrected by other methods, which is always associated with a loss of time; this, in turn, almost always reduces the value of the initial method or cancels it out altogether. The independence of action of the subordinates, i.e. their ability to act in accordance with the spirit of the order received, also plays a major role. The fact that the transfer of the 163rd Infantry Division was accomplished in such a surprisingly short time and over such great distances must be attributed to the exemplary cooperation in the above-mentioned sense of all the participants, down to the last driver.

The 163rd Infantry Division arrived just in the nick of time at the front line east of Salmijärvi. The Russians had continuously thrown new forces into the fight. The employment of the Division consolidated the local conditions in such a way that the methodical movement of the units in accordance with the plan was no longer endangered. In order to facilitate the conduct of the XIX Mountain Corps Command, I made the groupings consisting of more than two divisions east of Salmijärvi independent of the XIX Mountain Corps and placed it under the commanding general of the XXXVI Mountain Corps who, with his staff, was brought in from the area east of Rovaniemi. The date for starting the withdrawal of both Corps was to be determined essentially by events in the south. There the 169th Infantry Division - which until then had been part of the XXXVI Mountain Corps and was now directly subordinate to the Army Command - a week after the fighting at Salla had ended had reached the Arctic Sea road east of Rovaniemi; on that road it was now to provide security against the Finns, who were still pressing. His next marching objective would be Ivalo, a town 350 kilometers away. This made the interception zone in the south, which was becoming increasingly narrower as a result of continuous fighting with the Finns, superfluous.

In the first week of October the last ammunition train arrived from Rovaniemi carrying 400 tons of artillery ammunition and explosives. From it the ammunition for the units passing through the town was to be completed; some of it was to be transported by truck to the Northern Corps. The train was at the station located in the center of the small town, happily already abandoned by the inhabitants. For reasons that have not been clarified, the ammunition train exploded with all its contents and destroyed the town, most of whose houses were made of wood. Before this accident, some buildings had been destroyed for reasons of war.

We sincerely regret the fate of that town which had provided accommodation for so many German units and commandos for years and whose population was always friendly and helpful. We were also very sorry for the loss of the ammunition, especially when its consumption became on a large scale as the fighting in the Arctic Sea region began shortly thereafter. On October 16 the last rearguards evacuated the Rovaniemi area.

While the XVIII Mountain Corps, fighting continuously with the Finns who continued to press, marched along the Finnish-Swedish border road, the conduct of the operation had made it necessary to shift the center of gravity of the army, which during the war of positions had been in its southern wing; it was gradually driven northward.

The march of the two Corps was planned as follows: the XIX Mountain Corps was directed from Kirkenes to Reich Route 50, which begins in that locality and then passes immediately south of the North Cape; the XXXVI

Mountain Corps, with more than two Divisions, was to pass through Ivalo and Tromsø and reach Route 50 in the Porsanger Fjord area. The

169th Infantry Division, coming from the south, was to be incorporated in Ivalo to the latter Corps. For this reason, before continuing the withdrawal of both Corps, the arrival of that Division in the Ivalo area had to be awaited. The Army Command had moved its combat post from the Arctic Sea Road to a group of sheds in the forest north of Inari.

The fighting in the Arctic Sea region was fierce. The Russians attacked with particular power in the direction of Salmijärvi on the Arctic Sea Road and over Kirkenes.

From the south the Finns put heavy pressure on the 169th Infantry Division. They were repulsed several times with heavy losses. The pressure against the XIX Corps was soon so intense that it had to retreat on October 24 to the Kirkenes area. This forced the XXXVI Mountain Corps to move closer, which now had to intercept the Arctic Sea road also to the north, bringing it towards Salmijärvi. This Corps was, in turn, to be held there until the XIX Mountain Corps had set out along Route 50.

By the displacement of the center of gravity of the army to its northern wing, the XIX Mountain Corps - that because of the precarious road system was very difficult in its movements - was able to escape from the several attempts of envelopment of the numerically superior enemy. With the evacuation of Kirkenes the link between the XIX and XXXVI Mountain Corps was interrupted. The three Army Corps now marched each one by a road; between the two extreme Corps there was an interval of about 600 kilometers. Between these roads was impassable terrain, lacking roads and tracks. This situation, in which neither Corps could support the other if necessary, was an unavoidable consequence of the conditions of the terrain and the road system of that region.

At that time, especially in the north, a lot of snow had already fallen, although fortunately to a lesser extent than usual in normal years. On the other hand, the cold was intense. The Russians pressed the XIX Mountain Corps in Norwegian territory as far as the Tana Fjord area and the XXXVI Mountain Corps in Lapland as far as the Ivalo area. The prisoners taken produced the impression of great exhaustion. They were excellently equipped for the winter. When, finally, on November 3, the passage of the XXXVI Mountain Corps and the 169th Infantry Division through the Ivalo Gorge was completed under Finnish pressure, the last hurdle, according to all human foresight, had been cleared as far as the fighting was concerned. The Finns pressed this Corps all the way to the Norwegian border. The rearguards of the XIX Corps were at that time in the Tana Fjord.

There then followed marches lasting many weeks, of the foot troops that made up the vast majority of the Mountain Army, in the darkness and cold of the Arctic winter. Even though everything possible had been done in terms of accommodation and supplies, and there was hardly a unit that at the end of a day's march could not occupy heated accommodation, the demands on the troops, who had been on the march and in combat for almost two months, were very high. In the march, which up to then had been proceeding without hindrance, a friction occurred completely unexpectedly which could have had dangerous consequences.

When the equipment of the units and depots to be installed along Reich Route 50 was fixed in terms of horseshoes and ice spikes, we had taken as a basis the data gathered from previous experience with cattle and proceeded to apply a safety coefficient of 100 percent. It soon became apparent that after a march of about ten hours over the very hard, frosted granite that constituted the rutted track of Route 50, the shoes, including the ice spikes, had worn down to the thickness of a piece of paper and had to be replaced. The Mountain Army's manning was absolutely insufficient to meet the resulting unexpectedly large consumption. If this failure was not remedied very quickly, the army's march would have to be suspended based almost exclusively on hypermobile traction and in freighters. As a matter of urgency, horseshoes and nails were sent from Southern Norway by destroyers and directly from the Reich by transport planes to Norway. This crisis, which was caused by a seemingly minor cause, was thus averted in good time.

The frost covered the entire district as far as Southern Norway and made the march extremely difficult. The wagons of the foot units, with their iron-rimmed wheels, slipped sideways on any incline, no matter how slight, especially on curves, and sometimes overturned. It was tried to wrap the wheels with cloth rags or ropes in order

to give them a better adhesion; but in a short time they were worn out. A real problem was the struggle against the "skidding" of artillery pieces of all kinds. For that reason, the march was an exhausting task for the drivers of the yoke, the accompanying personnel and the service of the pieces. The experiences gathered in the winter campaigns in Russia did not know these facts.

The efforts caused by the vehicles were all the greater because the troops on foot only marched at night. This division of time was established so that the units could reach their resting places during the day and the watering places for the cattle, from which the ice always had to be removed first, could be found. The initiative for this time allocation came from the units themselves. At first I was skeptical, even though I had already considered it for reasons of defense of the columns against air attacks. It gave a great result in practice.

For a long time there was uncertainty as to whether or not the Russians would follow behind us. Only towards the middle of December was it recognized with some certainty that they would not follow overland. In reality they only followed us 150 kilometers into Norwegian territory. As reasons for the Russians not to carry out a more far-reaching operation into Norway, several appeared in the end, among which figure preferably the difficulty that such an undertaking presents in a general way in winter and then also, the opposition resulting from the destruction of means and ways of communication and of lodgings. Another reason could arise from the consideration of Scandinavia as a sphere of British interests. Nor did the continually expected attacks from the sea or landings take place. This was all the less explicable in that such enterprises would have represented a very grave danger to the mass of the Mountain Army.

It was only towards the end of December that the British radio shed some light on the matter. After reaching the Lyngen Fjord, four divisions were to be delivered to the Continent, three of which were to go to the western front and one to the eastern. They were the 6th SS Mountain Division, the 2nd Mountain Division and the 163rd and 169th Infantry Divisions and, in addition, the Command of the XVIII Mountain Corps. By the end of December the entire 6th SS Mountain Division and parts of the 2nd Mountain Division had already been transported across the Baltic Sea to Denmark, while the other two Divisions were still on the march to Oslo. The transfer of forces from Norway to the Continent was then announced by the British radio with the addition that the sea transport had been interrupted by the laying of mines in the Baltic Sea and by air attacks. In the communiqué it was further stated that the disruption of the march could have been carried out much more effectively in the Far North; but the detachment and withdrawal of the Mountain Army had been considered unfeasible, this operation having to be considered as the most difficult of the land war.

The Russians, therefore, did not follow us closely and no landing was made on the coast of Finmarca. These facts in no way detract from the character of military necessity of the evacuation and destruction carried out. A military necessity should not be assessed on the basis of the events that actually occurred but exclusively on the basis of the situation at the time when the measures were considered militarily necessary. And at the time when it was decided to take such measures, there existed all the preexisting circumstances which could rightly be expected to lead to such events.

Norway

Military necessity of the occupation of Norway.

Commander-in-chief of Norway.

The Army Command moved its combat post in accordance with the movement of units, first to Skoganvarre, then to Alta, and finally at the end of November to Run-dhaug, south of Lyngen Fjord. Skoganvarre is already in Norway. When I crossed the river Tana by the very weak-looking suspension bridge, the river that south of Skoganvarre marks the boundary between Finland and Norway, I realized with real sorrow that I had left Finland for good. The country had made new and lasting impressions on me and its acquaintance was an important episode in my life. In all the German soldiers there was a deep affection for the Finnish people, which they reciprocated in the same way.

I was now entering the jurisdiction of another people whom I knew from their history and from the works of their poets and writers. I knew that their majority was then contrary to us. There was no one in my Command and in the units who did not have the fullest understanding in this respect; but we also knew that we did not find in the Norwegians an analogous understanding for our situation. We were, for them, an enemy who had broken into their country. And yet the occupation of Norway by the Reich was nothing more than an act of self-defense. It only anticipated the British invasion by a couple of hours. This was confirmed, among others, also by Lord Hankey, who for 20 years was secretary of all British Cabinets and for an even longer time secretary of the Imperial Defense Council; in his book "Politics, Trials and Errors" (London, 1950) he says with regard to the projected occupation of Norway by England:

"If our operation was not aggressive, then theirs (referring to the Germans), which was the only chance they had to avoid being strangled, was not aggressive either. At that time I was a member of the Cabinet and we had no illusions about it. All of us knew that the Germans had to proceed like that".

On the trip to Rundhaug we again passed through the three long snow protection tunnels that I had traveled in the opposite direction in the summer. I was again able to admire these constructions, the result of an energetic resolution of clear views and an enormous use of personnel and material. In the Kvenangen Fjord a Navy boat took us to the stone island on which Hammerfest, the northernmost town in Europe, stands. The variety of mountains enclosing the harbor forms an enchanting picture. The symbol of Hammerfest is the grandiose block of rock that emerges steeply from the water dividing the harbor entrance.

The road then reaches Lyngen Fjord in the middle of its northern margin. Here a Navy minelayer, 600 tons displacement, awaited me, in which I rode along a large part of the future front. The mountains on the southern margin, snow-capped to near their foot, rise like sheer walls and emerge menacingly from the water. They offer a grandiose picture of arrogant beauty. Only small groups with great mountaineering experience and alpine equipment could attempt them. In this way, during the winter we could save a lot of forces in the occupation and thus carry out more frequent relays. The huge mountain massifs at the beginning of the fjord, on which our mainland positions were located, looked like a grim threat. It was only later that I was able to inspect them.

Rundhaug lies in a large pit, surrounded in all directions in a wide circle by mountains. tainted. The snow was one meter high. The sun was last seen in this region in mid-November and, according to the local inhabitants, it would not appear again before May. The town is only 6 kilometers away from the coast and is linked to Route 50 by a road that passes through a depression in the mountain. Interestingly, the temperature in the area near the coast had not dropped below zero degrees due to the influence of the Gulf Stream, while in the Rundhaug pit, about 6 kilometers from the coast, it was almost always -30 degrees.

In Rundhaug I was able to see the Northern Lights for the first time. It was on a clear, frosty night. The circumstances for the observation of this unique natural phenomenon were extraordinarily favorable. The northern sky resembled an undulating sea of faint transparent haze of blue, yellow, green, green and dark red, not very bright. The impression of a gentle swell in that sea of mist seemed produced by the continually changing color of each location. After a short time, the waves of color, lacking structure, took the form of bubbling veils, of hollow folds, in the same changing colors. They reached from the zenith to the vicinity of the earth and moved undulating towards me; but they melted into nothingness before reaching me, while new veils began the same game. Then, as at a signal, the veils all along the front suddenly passed to form chains of mountains that continually presented jagged peaks, full of varied colors. Shortly after this picture also fell apart and in front of me the sea of mist of formless colors undulated again. This restless image of a mysterious life was impressive for its considerable dimensions and for its extraordinariness. I could not include this phenomenon in the category of beauty, for it was too strange for that. I saw the aurora borealis frequently on subsequent occasions, but only once did it again reach the grandeur of that first day.

Shortly after arrival at Rundhaug, I inspected a portion of the new positions on the land front. After a two-hour drive through the hilly and mountainous region north of the town, we came to a wide hollow that presented the character of high mountains. Over the mountains to the east passed the border with Sweden. The hollow was surrounded by mountains that in many parts were so steep that the ice could not hold on to their walls. One of

them completely resembled in shape the Matterhorn of Switzerland on a reduced scale; another was almost a geometrical cone of gigantic dimensions. I had never seen in such a small space such a richness of shapes in a mountain landscape. Then we came through a steeply ascending valley, in the form of a ravine, to a second pit which was surrounded in a semicircle by pieces of mountain without interruption. On these were the positions. We had to abandon the vehicles. The ascent, at the pass, of 1,000 meters of altitude took us three hours. We followed a track marked out by high markers through the snow, which in some parts was knee-high and whose slope in certain stretches was up to 45 degrees.

On the other side of a deep ravine rose an almost vertical wall covered by a layer of ice that shone in intense green and blue colors, as if it were made entirely of emeralds and sapphires. From the bottom we could hear the muffled noise, like a distant thundering, of a torrent running under a layer of snow. The higher we climbed, the more intense the wind became, and soon after, clouds of snow began to rise, blocking our vision. We were glad to reach the first shelter of the position, of which until then only observation posts and shelters had been built.

Everywhere the experience of the Arctic winter in Lapland had been put to good use. The mountain hunters had set up their lodges with a great deal of circumspection and judgment. In the snowstorm these well-heated lodges were especially appreciated, although they were rather cramped. The position was occupied by units of the 6th Mountain Division.

By the time we reached the 1,000-meter pass, the weather had changed and we could see in the dim light up to the foot of the nearby mountain, where as in almost all the defensive positions chosen in the ridge area of the mountain, there were numerous outposts.

In order to determine the location of this position on the ground I had to resolve myself only on the basis of the reports of the reconnaissance bodies and the chart, notwithstanding my wishes to reconnoiter it first personally. I was now able to convince myself that the positions reconnoitered in the autumn by officers with war and mountain experience were also on the ground the most favorable.

The return had to be made in such a way that the rest did not have to take place in the darkness of the night. We followed the Division Commander, known for his alpine prowess, who had also guided us up. On the trail marked by the markers, the old tracks were completely covered by ice and there were only a few new ones. I considered with the Division Commander also the construction of a track to the position, which would soon be started. When we passed through the first hole, it was completely calm. The hills of such varied shapes seemed like specters in the afternoon gloom.

At the beginning of December a large part of the Mountain Army was still marching along Reich Route 50 north of Lyngen Fjord. From the Porsanger Fjord region at that time it was reported that there were heavy snowstorms. The rear guards were no longer in contact with the enemy, who were not advancing here. The units of the XVIII Mountain Corps, which had marched along the road near the Swedish border, had already passed the new position in a southerly direction. Only fractions of it had occupied the sector on the eastern wing of the new position situated transversely in the northwest corner of Finland. Here Finnish forces were assembled in front of the front and small combats were continuously engaged. That stretch of the position was already very well constructed and provided with sufficient accommodations, obstacles and minefields, so that there was no need to worry.

During the following days in Rundhaug I had to dispatch a very abundant documentation of studies, reports, sketches and letters related to the military situation and to the political and economic circumstances in Norway. Even though the landscape and my activity in Norway did not differ fundamentally from those in Finland, I now clearly realized that I had once again arrived in a new country with different circumstances. And this country was of considerable size; the combat front, if one disregarded the extreme north wing and the immediate area up to Narvik, was exclusively on the coast.

From the reports I was able to deduce that in Norway the Reich Commissar Terboven, who tried to exert influence even in military matters, ruled almost unrestrictedly. The latter was unacceptable to me and I resolved from the outset to adopt a very rigid conduct. The Swedish press helped me a great deal in that respect. It was

not kept secret that in the near future I was to be entrusted with the command-in-chief in Norway. Shortly thereafter news about it appeared in the foreign press. The Swedish newspapers also said that the future commander-in-chief in Norway could boast many successes in the past and was a very stubborn person, who would not tolerate anyone at his side. From this the newspapers concluded that Terboven's days were numbered.

I knew that Terboven was one of the few with whom Hitler had a relationship of trust and that he was also a close friend of Goebbels. From various sources I also received warnings. I resolved, as before in the Balkans, to hold firm to my intention and I also carried it out by imposing it everywhere. I also heard and read comments about dissatisfaction among the population because of measures and procedures adopted by the Reich Commissar which, in the opinion of the informant, were not infrequently exaggerated. In this respect I wanted to form my own judgment. In any case, I was to regard any avoidable discontent as detrimental to my mission. I decided from the outset not to support such a policy in the jurisdiction. The administration of the country was, it is true, not my business.

In my few hours of leisure I also felt in another way that I was in Norway.

How often, since the years of youth, fantasy brought me to this country! It was the time when, like so many others, I was under the spell of Nordic literature. It was first of all Henrik Ibsen who stirred the spirits and dominated the stages. Every epoch has its social problems and those concerning individuals as such. That era was especially rich in them and then it was believed to be able to solve them, contrary to what happened in the present one.

With a mastery that is difficult to achieve, Ibsen carried many of them into his dramas. Even if the problems of the time lost much of their interest in the later period, his plays are always young. He also often knew how to give his themes, linked to the period in which he wrote his plays, a character independent of a particular epoch. Or is it pretended that Nora has been overtaken in the present by time? And the problems raised in *Wild Duck*, *Woman of the Sea*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Peer Gynt* are always current and therefore in search of solutions.

Here I also found, living in the landscape and among Ibsen's people, that the environment that surrounded him provides many elements of judgment on his works that would otherwise remain ignored. That is why I wanted to reread Ibsen and I first took *Wild Duck*, after having reread *Peer Gynt* in the Far North. The other authors, among whom I felt a predilection for Björnsterne Björnson, remained for the time being postponed to Ibsen.

One pleasure I was looking forward to was the visit to Knut Hamsun, which I intended to pay in order to express my gratitude and admiration for the abundance of beauty and pleasure that I, along with hundreds of thousands of others, derived from reading his works. He lived in southern Norway and was the representative figure of Norwegian letters of the generation after Ibsen. The subjects of his novels were always episodes from real life, seen and shaped by the temperament of an artist. I was unfortunately unable to make the visit to Hamsun because I was soon recalled from Norway to other duties. I was informed that Hamsun was not held in high esteem by certain German authorities in Oslo, because he frequently wrote letters of interest to many of his countrymen. There must be very few who do not read with deep emotion his last book *By Covered Paths* in which he considers his treatment after the war, without argument, without discussion and without passion and only for his artistic account. The new Norwegian literature that emerged in Hamsun's shadow does not appeal to me much. I would, however, like to make an exception for the work of Bojer Fisherman of Lofoten, to which I will return later. Because of the isolation in which Germany lived during the war and partly also before it, there were few foreign works that we could read; but when I arrived in Helsinki I found in the bookstores several books that interested me and that I could not get in Germany; in nearby Stockholm you could get any book you wanted.

It was time to settle the final location of my headquarters. The Command-in-Chief of the "Norwegian" Army until then was in Oslo. But I had always disliked cities and even relatively large towns for HQ accommodation. I felt that Oslo was also too far south. I finally settled on Lilehamer, a small town 200 kilometers north of Oslo,

on the railroad and road linking the north and south of the country.

On the occasion of my move to Lilehamer, I also wanted to observe from the sea the coastal region stretching from Tromsø-Narvik (Tromsø is 100 kilometers south of Rundhaug, and Narvik 200 kilometers), a region of extraordinary importance. He wanted to use the time he still had to stay in Rundhaug to get to know the parts he could reach from land. Hitler

had ordered to reinforce that region especially and also to prepare its defense to the east, i.e. against Sweden. I only learned the reason for this later from Hitler himself. At that time I knew only a study of the conduct of naval warfare in which he pointed out that after the loss of the maritime bases in the west because of the invasion, Norway was Germany's only strategic maritime position. After the separation of Finland and because of the lack of protection of the Swedish border against the Russians, the relations of Germany and Sweden had become very insecure, so the need arose to protect the Narvik-Tromsø region also against the east.

On our reconnaissance trip we passed various fjords that penetrate deep inland, crossing them at places near their beginnings, and finally followed a road that took us along the southern edge of a tongue of land that enters to a great distance into the sea. In front of us was the island town of Tromsø, separated by a narrow channel. In the twilight of the day - here, too, the sun disappears during the winter period - the town made a romantic impression. The island is quite flat and we were surprised by the thick layer of humus that covers the soil, which is used for agriculture in summer. Here, too, several heavy and medium-sized shore batteries were in very favorable positions, which together with the batteries on the tongue of land and on the neighboring islands give considerable strength to this area. It was to be further strengthened by the employment of various batteries remaining free in the evacuated part of Northern Norway and thus complete the defense. I found the infantry forces in this area too small.

A painful impression was made by the battle ship Tirpitz, which was lying southwest of the city in shallow water. The wreck was caused on the occasion of a British air raid by the enormous pressure of a 6,000 kilogram bomb that fell at very close range next to the ship. The attack was carried out by two British bombers which on November 12, 1944 flew over Southern Norway towards Sweden and then continued the flight over neutral territory to the north out of range of German air scouting. At the height of Tromsø they crossed in a few moments the Norwegian region which is extremely narrow there and attacked the battle ship by surprise. Because of the steep slope of the seabed, the ship came to be with the deck and starboard side under water, while the keel and port side emerged from the sea. The salvage of part of the crew was thus rendered impossible. A certain number could be extracted through openings drilled in the steel hull. This technical masterpiece of its time, capable of deploying terrible power, was transformed into a worthless and impotent hull in a matter of seconds. How often the work of man is close to stupid!

For the sea front in the Tromsø-Narvik area the 210th Infantry Division, which was still on the march, and for the land front against the east, which passed through mountains of stones and fjäls, the 7th Mountain Division.

On the continuation of the journey along the road to Narvik, we passed several times very close to the coast for long stretches; often there were small islands at a short distance from the coast. How easily one could interrupt from the sea side a march along this road that did not allow travel! In the vicinity of Narvik we reached the East Fjord, which could not be surrounded by land because a large part of the rocky mountains that surround it fall almost vertically into the sea. We transshipped on a large motor raft, with a capacity of ten trucks, across the fjord and disembarked in the vicinity of the boundary to Narvik. This town lies at the beginning of the West Fjord on the steep hill of a tongue of land that penetrates like an arch into the sea and is separated from the mainland by steep stone mountains. This is the narrowest part of Norway. This area is very difficult to attack from the sea because of the nearby defense works and batteries, all very well built in the living rock; to this it must be added that before reaching Narvik the enemy would previously have to open up The western fjord, which was very well defended, was a very well-defended pass.

Narvik was the shipping port for iron ore extracted from the Swedish mining region of Kiruna. This region is linked to the port by a very complicated mountain railroad. The loading ramps at Narvik are interesting; the

wagon load passes directly into the ore carrier-steamer. From Narvik I was also able to observe an impression of the various areas where in April 1940, in a general cooperation between Army and Navy forces, extraordinarily hard and difficult fights were fought with the British for the possession of this region. The mountain troops, a part of whom were transported in warships and the greater part of whom were dropped from transport planes in the mountains and who under the most intense inclement weather and in the most difficult terrain fought violent battles against the tenacious enemy, were for the most part Austrian. They were later reinforced by the crews of the destroyers sunk in the fighting.

Nowhere does a fight call for so much physical capacity and energy and so many ideas as in the mountains. Although the mountain dwellers, among whom our hunters were largely recruited, often seemed heavy in their gait and bearing, and in their demonstrations not infrequently appeared to be excessively reflective, we should not be led to draw conclusions about the energy and spirit of these men from these outward appearances. These exteriorities are a product of the environment and of solitary existence or of life in very small communities. The same environment also trains for a maximum capacity of performance and endurance of the body and teaches the spirit to react with independence and energy in the face of the real, changing circumstances of the struggle for life. And it is precisely these qualities that constitute an important part of the demands that characterize a good soldier.

My days in Rundhaug were numbered as I wanted to stay there alone until the mass of the army had overtaken the new position. This happened in mid-December. Before that, on the 12th of that month, I moved again to Narvik, where a Navy tracker was waiting for me, where I stayed for two days. I went through the sea of islands in the Narvik-Tromsø area to reconnoiter them from the sea, from the point of view of their defense. The ship was only able to dock on the shore on the other side of the fjord, which we reached after a several-hour long and rather bumpy transfer on a large raft.

The next morning we headed out to sea, accompanied by a patrol boat, first to the West Fjord. The fjord is so wide that the outlines of its mountainous shores and the islands bordering it were barely distinguishable in the light morning fog. On each side of the fjord was one of our heaviest batteries, whose pieces had a caliber of 40.6 cm. We then headed north and went to the region of the Lofoten Islands. These hundreds of islands, of widely varying sizes, consist for the most part of rocky mountains without vegetation, which drop steeply into the sea; few of them have flat surfaces with settlements. On the southern side of the mountains, the snow reaches the water, while on the other sides the snow had disappeared due to the violence of the storms. This journey, which lasted a day, by wide arms of the sea, then again by very narrow channels between the stone walls and passing in front of the multiform islands, was very impressive and a singular event. There was little room for batteries and footholds. For the most part it was already occupied; but it was intended still to complete the manning.

We also visit the main town of Lofoten, the small and picturesque fishing town of Svolvær. North of Lofoten is the Vesterålen archipelago with its main settlement Harstad on the island Himsøya. In the mild climate of this island, which is attributed to a characteristic of the Gulf Stream, even rose bushes flourish in the open air. The Lofoten region

is populated at certain times by enormous quantities of herring and cod, whose fishing is greatly facilitated by the arms and channels formed by the islands. Here is the region of the famous Lofoten fishermen, the best sailors in Norway. I tried to learn about their way of life and observed, first of all, that their dwellings were often extremely primitive. From their accounts of pre-war conditions it was clear that their standard of living was often precarious. They complained of the low prices that in normal times traders paid for fish and that they were powerless against this, for they had to sell them at all costs. The true value of the fish was reflected, in their opinion, only in the profits of the middlemen.

I was very glad to have read Bojer's book *Lofoten Fisherman* shortly before. This admirable book so vividly presented to me the hard and sacrificial existence of the fishermen constantly surrounded by the dangers of the North Sea and its violence, that when I set foot in a village and the fishermen's dwellings, I thought I recognized among the muscular and tanned silhouettes of tall stature, old acquaintances whose destinies, thoughts and

desires were familiar to me. I admired the high and skillful art of the author who takes us to the intimacies of the simplest lives and makes us follow the path they follow in their existence during the dangerous daily work, which not infrequently ends in an inevitably tragic way.

Reading this book evoked the memory of another, written several decades earlier, in which the life of the fisherman is artistically narrated; I am referring to that of Pierre Loti *Pêcheur d'Islande*. The fishermen of Lofoten and Iceland have many analogies created by the Nordic sea, the daily struggle and tragedy of life. On the other hand, nowhere is the profound difference in temperament between Scandinavian and Roman men better externalized than in both books.

During this period, practical tests of submarines equipped with schnorchel were conducted in front of the enemy. Three submarines of the small 250-ton type were to proceed from Narvik to infiltrate one of the convoys sailing through the Arctic Sea to Murmansk and Archangel, consisting almost always of 50 to 60 freighters and protected by warships, from battleships to fighter-submarines, as well as carrier-based aircraft. The submarines were ordered to return to Narvik after several days of travel in the convoy. The trial had been a complete success. Shortly thereafter a submarine with schnorchel arrived at Narvik, coming on a continuous submerged voyage from the port of St. Nazaire, on the French Atlantic coast, and which on its route was to make a complete loop around England. The results of these vessels proved that the new submarines were a more invulnerable weapon than those before the invention of radar.

For the defense of the northern sector of the Army from the Lyngen Fjord up to and including Narvik, the creation of an Army Grouping Command (Expression used in the German Army to designate a small army, almost always constituted for a special case), which was under the command of the general commander of the XIX Mountain Corps and which was composed of that Corps and the LXXI Army Corps, was foreseen.

Late in the evening we reached our berth and the next morning we continued our journey by vehicle to the small town of Mo, Norway's northernmost station, some 500 kilometers away. Shortly thereafter we were to pass a 15 kilometer wide fjord in a large motor raft. It was the last rafting stretch of Route 50. As I recall the continuation of the journey on the frosted road, one superlative follows another. To the left high snow-capped mountains, often with frost; one frost reaches almost to the road.

It runs through an extraordinarily varied landscape, over high plateaus, through valleys, through fjords that penetrate deep inland, through villages with well-kept surroundings and soon also through ever-changing wooded areas. Here I became convinced that Norway is not surpassed by any country in Europe in its grandiose, often wild beauty.

On this trip I visited a portion of the forces employed in the defense of the coast. They were well billeted and well supplied. Given the great extent of the front the service was, by the way, heavy.

There were stretches of coastline up to 100 kilometers long composed of steep rocks that did not allow any landings. However, there were also coastal batteries there, almost always in positions built by blasting into the rock and often only accessible from the sea. They were responsible for the protection of ship traffic in the vicinity of the coast. On the entire coast of Norway we had the large number of 261 shore batteries.

Late at night we reached the small town of Mo, the final station of the Norwegian railroad, which during the occupation of the country had been extended by 500 kilometers to the north. We slept on the train, on which our car was also loaded. The following afternoon we arrived in Drontheim. I interrupted the trip in order to visit the XXXIII Army Corps Command established there. In Drontheim the fjord forms several narrow branches. The town has been built around them and the mostly steep slopes, so that it presents an extremely varied appearance. The corps headquarters was on a height on the northern edge of the town. From the road that curves beautifully up the mountain, one enjoys a magnificent view over Drontheim, intimately connected to the sea. One had the impression that the sea, like the fingers of a gigantic hand, was reaching into the city as if to grasp it. British air raids had caused some destruction.

The Army Corps covered an area of several hundred kilometers; its center of gravity was in and around Drontheim. There were, in addition, several other favorable places for a landing. Sectors, often very extensive,

where the rocks fell steeply into the sea and where no road led from the coast to the interior, were left unoccupied. In spite of this, the mission of the Army Corps was not an easy one because of the great extension and the incomplete strength of the units.

The departure of our train was delayed, so the scheduled passenger train was dispatched before ours. Shortly thereafter we learned that that train hit a mine in a tunnel. There were numerous casualties. Two soldiers who were traveling were wounded; numerous civilians were killed or wounded. It was generally believed that the attack was directed against me. I felt here for the first time the activity of the so-called "resistance movement", which was in truth only very insignificant in its action against the work of the army, but which not infrequently caused losses among the civilian population. My train was diverted to a branch line and on the evening of December 17 we arrived in Oslo.

The next day I visited the former Commander-in-Chief of Norway, Colonel General von Falkenhorst. He briefed me on the fundamental political and military problems of his command jurisdiction and I then received the Norwegian Command-in-Chief from him. It was December 18. I then paid brief courtesy visits to Reich Commissar Terboven and Prime Minister Quisling.

I also saw in the city some units of the 6th SS Mountain Division being shipped for transport to ports on the continent. The Division was the first troop unit that I was to deliver for another front. The others were on the march, and still for a long time, to Oslo.

Oslo is a city that impresses somewhat soberly in the midst of admirable surroundings. In Oslo I was able to see again how much habit influences the desires and resolutions of man. When, after my first stay of several weeks in the solitudes of Lapland, I arrived in the small coastal town of Oulu, this contact with the usual ways of life impressed me as a liberation. Then I lived for a long time in the Nordic wilderness, except for the few interruptions of my trips to Helsinki. That wild solitude had a particular charm and in a short time had subjugated me. So the return to the big city did not mean much to me. On the contrary, I was happy to start, after a two-day stay, the trip to the rural town of Lilehamer.

We traveled for almost four hours north on an excellent road that was very frosted in some stretches. The landscape, crisscrossed by chains of hills, of broad lines, mostly of land without forests, produced an impression of softness and benevolence. Finally we reached a wide valley with a long, narrow lake at the bottom. On its eastern slope was our locality. On the main street and two short parallel streets stood neat masonry houses. In the east was a beautiful forest of thick trees and in its interior were numerous houses, mainly small wooden houses. In these and in a hotel, a large wooden building, also located in the forest, we set up our headquarters.

Lilehamer was a favorite place for skiing because of the favorable terrain above the village. Due to the war situation, all the lodgings built for the sport were unoccupied. The mission that I had opportunely given to the staff to disturb as little as possible the private life of the inhabitants by accommodating the Command, was fulfilled by choosing Lilehamer; also from the point of view of driving the place was right.

It was necessary for me to make known to the population of the country, as a first step, the principles that would govern my conduct and that of the units under my command. For this purpose I called for an interview with the Norwegian press. Naturally I had informed Hitler of my intention and received his approval. In that interview I said, among other things, the words: "I am an enemy of all harshness". It is very likely that such terms would not have been uttered in the Third Reich by an official personality. I expressed afterwards that in my jurisdiction I would not permit any injustice and that I authorized any Norwegian who believed he was suffering injustice to address me in writing or in person. Liaison with the press was effected through the Reichskommissar. I had a justified feeling that he would find an interview with me unwelcome and would try to prevent it by all means. This was a reason to speed it up. In this way the interview was published in all the newspapers before countermeasures could be effective.

Shortly after 07:00 a.m. I received the communication through the OKW that Hitler had forbidden the distribution of copies of the interview. Since the distribution of the newspapers had been going on since 05:00 nothing could be done. I was convinced that Hitler knew nothing about this matter and that in this case it was

the political clique around him which proceeded under the influence of the Reich Commissar.

In Lilehamer the time was devoted preferably to organizational work required by the defense. Again I had to study a series of reports and projects, carried out with great judgment and precision, but which could never replace the picture of reality obtained personally, so that it was indispensable to make several trips that demanded a lot of time. My stay at headquarters was always brief. Obtaining an accurate picture was not easy, given the extraordinarily large size of the army area. Northern and Central Norway I knew enough about for the time being, even though there was still much to be completed here as well. Southern Norway, on the other hand, was completely unknown to me. It is the region that stretches southward from Drontheim, widening in a wide arc to the west, and where the Norwegian territory reaches its maximum width. To characterize the wild romantic magnitude and fantastic beauty of this region again requires recourse to superlatives. The mountains rise to a height of 2,500 meters and here is the region of the largest ferns in Europe. One of these ferns is the size of Thuringia. It is also

the region of the enormous fjords. Thus the Hardanger Fjord penetrates 170 kilometers inland and the Sognet 180. This region, which has few roads and extremely vulnerable railroads, presents the greatest difficulties for military operations. On its western coast are the towns of Drontheim, Bergen and, as the southernmost, Staranger. They were the most important centers of defense because of their excellent harbors and the nature of the terrain in the immediate area.

The railroads that reach these three cities depart radially from Oslo. The line to Bergen is undoubtedly one of the most complicated railway constructions in Europe; it must have more than 800 tunnels and an equal number of bridges and viaducts. Its route passes through the formidable mountain massif that fills the southwestern part of Norway; it crosses numerous ravines, crosses mountain ranges or goes through rocky slopes opened by force of explosion. Where the track skirts the slope of a fjord, there are stretches where the rock wall reaches almost to the track, while on the other side nothing can be seen of the route but down there, only the sea at a dizzying depth. This unprecedented audacity of the route and the enormous deployment of technical means make the construction of this route a feat that imposes admiration and impresses. Europe can present nothing equivalent to this journey from Oslo to Bergen, which requires about 12 hours, for its romantic and often somber beauty.

The railroad to Stavanger continues to Kristiansund for the most part a short distance from the coast and avoids the difficult mountain. The southern coast of Norway is often flat, if mostly hilly; it has a gentle character and does not know the grandeur of the other parts of the country. The section of the railroad from Kristiansund to Stavanger is relatively new. It is also one of the most difficult mountain roads. The line to Drontheim, of which I already knew a stretch, goes mostly around the mountain to the east and north and proves to be a less complicated construction.

Not only Drontheim but also the other two cities are worth visiting for the beauty of their location and for numerous buildings that speak of an ancient past. As far as details are concerned there is unfortunately little, what I have seen, as the time available was scarce to tour the terrain and the defensive works very scattered over a large area. The coast is everywhere so articulated that the organization of the defense had many difficulties because it demanded numerous forces. The works built almost always in the rock showed a degree of perfection that was reached in several years of work. But there was always still much to be perfected and completed. In Bergen, where there are also many reminders of the Hanseatic era, a concrete shelter for 6 to 8 submarines, whose roof had a thickness of seven meters of concrete, was interesting.

On the occasion of these trips I also visited the military authorities whose headquarters were in the vicinity of Oslo. They were: the Commanding General of the LXX Army Corps, who exercised command of the southern sector of the Mountain Army, the Commander-in-Chief of the Marine Grouping "North" and the Commanding General of the Luftwaffe in Norway. The defense of Norway required the closest cooperation of all three parts of the Wehrmacht. The personal preconditions, which are of really decisive importance for that purpose, were given in their full extent.

In the midst of the intense activity of the first weeks of my assignment as Commander-in-Chief in Norway, I

received, on January 14, 1945, the order to report to the Fuehrer's headquarters. The information was added that a return to Norway was not to be counted on. It was obvious to me that this meant a new task. I mentally went over the various fronts, the circumstances of which I knew only inadequately on a personal level, and could not find an answer. I gave myself up to a state of mind that almost bordered on fatalism. The general situation of the war gave to the uncertainty which again presented itself to me as to my immediate future, a certain tinge of tragedy.

1. East Prussia

For the time being destined for Curland.

First measures in the East Prussian crisis.

On January 16 in the evening I flew from Oslo to Berlin, where at that time the Führer's headquarters were located in the Reich Chancellery. The next morning I visited Colonel General Guderian in Zossen, who at that time was Chief of the General Staff of the Army. I found this General, who always produced an impression of assurance combined with power, in a gloomy and embittered state of mind. He complained, first of all, about Hitler's interventions in his efforts to stabilize the eastern front and about the atmosphere of distrust which hung over everything. He considered it wrong that the forces which were left free after the offensive in the Ardennes was terminated were transported to Hungary instead of being kept available at the bend of the Vistula. He pointed to the situation that was being created here by the new Russian offensive, the catastrophic consequences of which could not yet be mastered to the full extent at that time. I had the feeling that Guderian was suffering greatly from the continuing differences with Hitler and that in the long run he would not be able to continue with him. He advanced to me that he would be the commander-in-chief of the Curland Army Group. It was completely unexpected for me.

In the evening of the 17th I introduced myself to Hitler. Even though half a year had elapsed since my last visit, I found him little changed. Only his left arm occasionally trembled in a way that attracted attention; but nothing was observable of a physical decline; spiritually he had the same vivacity as ever. He went on at once to speak of the retreat of the Mountain Army to Norway, and called the detachment of the army from a triple embrace of the enemy an outstanding feat which he himself had considered unachievable. After the words "You saved Germany's best army. I thank you for it," he handed me the swords to the oak leaves.

He then asked me details of the defense of the Narvik-Tromsø region. He spoke about the brilliant results of the test voyages made last autumn by the first submarines with schnorchel. He did not want to employ these submarines in isolation, he said, but when he had at least 200 completed so that none would fall prematurely into enemy hands. He expected the completion of that number in April. A decisive effectiveness of the use of these submarines was promised against the supply traffic of the Allied armies in France, which could not be paralyzed for weeks, as it happened with the maritime communication of England in 1941, without very serious consequences for the Allies. The coastal region between Narvik and Tromsø with its enormous number of small islands and fjords, where hundreds of U-boats could be housed in a widely dispersed manner so that they could hardly be attacked from the air, was planned as a base for the U-boats. From there they had free passage, which could not be hindered, to the open sea, whereas from the North Sea it was no longer possible or only with great losses to reach the open sea. Preparations were beginning for the reception and supply of the submarines in the coastal waters north of Narvik. This was the reason for the special defense measures in the Narvik-Tromsø region.

Hitler then went on to talk about my future task. He entrusted me with the command of Army Group Curland, where in view of the diminishing snow I expected the beginning of a new battle, the sixth, in that area. "Since the fifth battle I have had to weaken the Army Group by eight infantry Divisions and three Armored Divisions," he told me, "the Russian effective has not been modified; in spite of this, I hope that you will hold Curland. I cannot say that the

mission was for me a pleasant surprise. Also this Army Group was isolated and could only be reached by sea or air. I also knew that the fifth battle in the autumn of 1944, in which Riga was lost, despite the considerably superior strength of the Army Group at that time, was a setback coupled with a heavy loss of ground which led to the Army Group being cut off from the Eastern Front.

I had often reflected in recent times on the whole conduct of the war and my thoughts dwelt with some concern on the fact that in no operation, tactical action or other enterprise which I had conducted, had I had a setback. According to the law of probabilities it was natural that once it should occur; but there are still many other factors that make up successes and failures. Over many of these the commander exercises no or only a slight influence.

The greatest worries caused me the preceding news from the other fronts. In the east the Russians had a few days earlier broken the front on the Vistula, and in the west the offensive launched from the Ardennes with insufficient forces, notwithstanding the initial surprising successes, had had no other result than to obtain a delay in the continuation of the Allied offensive.

Later I asked Colonel General Jodl how the Supreme Command envisaged the further development and termination of the war. He replied that the Russians were to be prevented by all means from setting foot on Reich territory; the war itself would be ended by political means. While I was still in Norway, news of negotiations with the Western powers had leaked out. Naturally, we had no way of verifying their veracity. Among other circumstances, we connected the Ardennes offensive with them and assigned to it the purpose of obtaining a better negotiating position.

It is very easy to expect or even demand political steps from a commander-in-chief. Before the war and during the war the military man, except for the highest position in the military hierarchy, was accustomed to be completely unaware of the problems and motives of politics at large or only occasionally, as was Hitler. We were brought up to regard the resolutions and decisions of the political leadership as a fait accompli, which lay outside the area of our duties and influence.

We considered this orientation to be absolutely correct, even if the State's policy in a given case did not meet our wishes and hopes. If this was already true for periods of calm evolution, it should be all the more true for difficult situations. To expect or demand from a general in this field more than from any other citizen of the State, on the ground that he has at his disposal certain means of force, is a very narrow criterion, for these are at his disposal only to be employed in the sense of the policy of the State, but not for a different or contrary purpose. It is also evident that the power of a general to dispose of his troops when he employs them in the sense of the policy of the State must be indisputable and out of the question. But if he wishes to employ his troops against that policy or against the persons conducting the policy, it will be more than doubtful whether he can still count on their obedience. This he will not be able to do under any circumstances if in a large part of the troops there are ties of a personal or ideological nature with the personality who conducts the policy.

That is why I considered as utopian the statement of Colonel General Halder, known after the war, that if in the year 1938 it had come to a war against Czechoslovakia he, as Chief of Staff of the Army, would have led the Army against Hitler. Such utterances in the mouth of such a person are apt to disturb the spirits of those who did not know the circumstances and atmosphere of that time. According to my knowledge of the conditions of that time, anyone who would have addressed the units with the idea of eliminating Hitler would not have come out unscathed.

Already in the first period of the war against Russia, Hitler forbade generals to submit applications for retirement. The order stated that even a soldier could not leave the trench and go home if he was not satisfied with something. It was not admissible for a general to be given a special right in this field.

After the interview with Hitler I received a few days leave and went to Austria to see my family. On the evening of January 25 I was again in Berlin and the next day I flew to Cur- landia. The weather was rather wet; the ground was shrouded in a light fog; the coast we crossed at Stolpemünde was clearly designed. The three fighter planes that were to accompany me in the air over the Baltic Sea could not fly because of the weather.

Then came the long monotonous flight over the Baltic, in which no ships were in sight. The weather gradually improved, and at last the coast of Curland appeared as a flat, narrow strip, illuminated by the gleams of the sun. Its details became more and more clearly visible; the forests appeared as dark surfaces and soon after we saw the straight lines of white foam of the waves breaking on the beach. We flew a stretch inland over fields and forests and landed on January 26 about noon at Windau airfield. From here we continued our journey by a poor road to Goldingen, where Army Group Headquarters was located. The terrain was completely flat, mostly covered by agricultural fields; there were also forests. It rises, on average, about 150 meters above sea level - what a difference from Norway!

Goldingen was a small town with some nice streets. The wooden houses in a suburb had a distinctly Russian look. In the town were installed the offices of the master's quarters. The Conduction echelon was installed in a large castle located about half an hour away from the city. This impressive building was once the residence of a large Baltic rural landowner. In 1940, when the country was occupied by the Russians, all the furniture was removed from this castle as from almost all others in the Baltic States. The tables, chairs and cabinets of its present furnishings were the work of the units' master craftsmen. I had a bedroom and a workroom in the gardener's house, also abandoned, located a short distance away. Both buildings were on the edge of a forest and had not been attacked by Russian aircraft until then. In case of air raids, a number of shelters had been built.

In the afternoon a review of the situation was begun, presented by the Chief of Staff of the Army Group, General von Natzmer. On the front of the two armies a war of positions was being waged. Although on the entire eastern front the Russian offensive was in full swing, no attack intentions had been noticed here. I announced my visit to the commander-in-chief of the 18th Army and to an Army Corps for the following day. But this visit did not become effective until the middle of March. The meeting with the Chief of Staff and other organs of my command continued at 23:00 when a radiotelegraphic order was received from the OKW stating that I with my staff should arrive before noon on February 27 at the headquarters of Army Group "North", which was fighting in East Prussia, and take over the command of this Army Group. In my military life and especially during the war I have had several surprises; but this one seemed to me more than extraordinary. It was exactly 12 hours since I had set foot on the soil of Curlandia.

In the Army Group in Curland there was no clear picture of the situation in East Prussia, as this situation was changing very rapidly at that time. It was only known that the Army Group, which until January 12 had been on the eastern border of East Prussia and in the Narev, was now in a very difficult situation because of the Russian offensive launched on that day. The 3rd Armored Army, which was on the left wing of the Army Group, had been pushed in the direction of Königsberg. The right wing of the Army Group, the 2nd Army, in position on the right, had been pushed in the direction of Königsberg.

The 4th Army, which was located in the center, in the lake area around Lötzen, had its northern flank badly exposed and in the south it was in the process of being enveloped. The 4th Army, located in the center, in the lake area around Lötzen, as a result of these events had its northern flank badly exposed and in the south was in the process of being enveloped. This army was trying to organize a defensive front to the east and southeast and, at the same time, to fight its way westward. It was not known to what extent that intention had been successful.

In addition to the above-mentioned news, there were other reports that, in a general way, the front of combat of the Group of Armies was very fractioned and that a part of it was on the move as well as that onslaughts of Russian armored units had reached the Headquarters of the Group of Armies. It was not known, however, where the latter was on the night of January 26. In any case I received the impression that in the Army Group in East Prussia a great crisis had arisen. The thought of assuming command in chief in East Prussia aroused gloomy thoughts; but I could do nothing but carry out the order received. In spite of the prevailing bad weather, it was a matter of course to fly. I resolved to fly out on the 27th at about 0900 from Windau.

In East Prussia at that time there was a large airfield at Heiligenbeil, some 40 kilometers south of Königsberg, and a smaller one with concrete runways on the earthen tongue in front of Pillau. On the morning of January 27, when the flight to Heiligenbeil started, there was a fairly heavy snowstorm. Because of the bad

weather, three fighter planes that were to accompany me could not fly this time either. We had to fly about 150 kilometers away from Memel, where at that time a German Army Corps was encircled on the ground. The Russians had a large number of fighter planes there. We hoped, however, that our flight would be hidden from the Russians because they had no radar equipment. Shortly after we were over the Baltic Sea, the snowstorm ended and above us the sun was shining in a cloudless, summer-blue sky. Below us was an unlimited cloud field, smooth as if it were made of boards, which was very thin and low over the sea, as could be deduced from the water visible through some clearings; when we approached the coast of East Prussia, the snowstorm began again. We flew at a reduced altitude over the narrow strip bordering the Frische Haff and the frosted surface of the latter. Over the latter I saw a column of horse-drawn vehicles moving in the direction of the Nehrung and reaching the mainland with their tails. I could not explain to myself then what it was.

A very depressed state of mind prevailed at the airfield. The commander of the airfield was not very oriented about the situation. He gave me the impression that even in difficult circumstances he would not lose his wits. From a telephone inquiry to the Luftwaffe commander in Königsberg, I learned that the headquarters of the Army Group was located at the former armored force headquarters on the outskirts of the small town of Zinten, situated about 40 kilometers east of Heiligenbeil. Despite the short distance, it took me almost two hours to make this journey, as the road was covered with endless columns of vehicles made up of the rural population fleeing to the west.

Now I also found the explanation of the column I had seen on the frosted surface of the Haff. The vehicles were usually long heavy wagons drawn by two to four horses; most had a canvas or wooden roof. The drivers were on foot, and men and women were also seen among the vehicles.

The situation on the lower reaches of the Alle was not clear. The 4th Army had succeeded in forming a defensive front to the east, generally along the Alle as far as Guttstadt, which then described an arc south of Mehlsack and was supported by the Frische Haff west of Frauenburg. In order to re-establish the broken link with the 2nd Army in the lower course of the Passarge and on the Nogat (the right arm of the mouth of the Vistula), the 4th Army was attacking with its right wing in the direction of Elbing and Preussisch Holland against the powerful Russian offensive wedge, which had previously succeeded in separating the 2nd Army from the Group of Armies.

My opponent was the "White Russian Front" (group of armies), composed of several armies, with a total of 105 Divisions, and in addition to the 5th Armored Army, 2 independent Armored Corps and some artillery Divisions. The command in chief was exercised by Marshal Tscherniakovs-ky. Our force ratio was approximately 1 to 5; but as far as tanks were concerned it was manifestly even more unfavorable.

On the morning of the 28th, the day after my arrival, I proceeded to Königsberg, in order to obtain first impressions of the situation in Samland by an interview with the Commander-in-Chief of the 2nd Armored Army, Colonel General Rauss, and with the commandant of Königsberg. Here I also deemed it advisable to speak to the gauleiter of East Prussia. It was a clear and extremely cold day. A strong east wind made the low temperature even more sensible and intemperate. On this trip I realized with regret that for the first time I had to lead the fight on German territory.

I used the Reich motor route (autobahn) and when I was quite close to the city several Russian shells fell a few hundred meters in front of me on the autobahn. The fire rapidly increased in intensity. There was no doubt that the Russians had succeeded in gaining ground in the lower Alle, where the situation at night had already been very critical and partly reported to be unclear. I was forced to leave the autobahn and reached Königsberg by a road further west.

The destruction caused by the Russian aviation attacks only in some parts of the city was then of a certain extent.

In a small town near the western edge of the city, I met the Commander-in-Chief of the 3rd Armored Army. He related the development of the present situation. His units, which had been engaged in continuous fighting against a far superior enemy in bitter cold since January 12, had suffered severe casualties and were quite exhausted. One part of the Armored Army was now fighting immediately east of Königsberg and another to the

northeast and north of the city as far as the Kurische Haff, east of Cranz. I pointed out the special importance of the area around Cranz in keeping open the road leading through the Kurische Nehrung from Memel to Samland; it was the only road left available to the XXVIII Army Corps after the imminent evacuation of Memel, to reach German territory. I knew Colonel General Rauss very well and knew that he was doing everything possible to hold his front; but I also knew the reduced strength of his units and learned that the situation in Samland was extremely critical. It was doubtful whether the front could withstand further attacks and it was equally doubtful when Memel's forces could be counted on to arrive.

I then visited the commandant at Königsberg, not far away. He reported on the defense works, which on the eastern front were supported by the works on the old fortress; their construction was well advanced, which could not yet be said of the other fronts, which were somewhat further away from the city. For their defense only a few local forces were available. If necessary, it was to be carried out by units of the 3rd Armored Army.

Finally I went to see the gauleiter of East Prussia, Koch, who resided in the same city; I had heard at Headquarters complaints against him for his intervention in military affairs, which he pretended to justify by his position as Reich Defense Commissar. I made it clear to him, and he also understood that the defense of East Prussia in all its details was to be carried out exclusively at my discretion and in accordance with my orders, and that the Reich Defense Commissar would fulfill his mission in the best possible way if he placed the forces and the means at his disposal exclusively at the service of the

measures ordered by me. I warned him that he must not let a conflict arise, for in such a case I would not hesitate to use force. During my words he became more and more visibly moved; he wanted to get angry once more, but he restrained himself and said to me, "Mr. Colonel General, no one has ever spoken to me like that; but I assure you that I am completely behind you." I want to preface this by expressing that he also kept that promise while I was in East Prussia. My staff, which with the exception of the chief had lived together the previous development, was very much surprised at the completely different conduct of the regional government and its organs.

I also discussed the evacuation of the inhabitants with Koch. This was a matter exclusively for the regional government and the civil administration authorities. The supreme authority had ordered that the population should be evacuated from the area of the combatant troops as well as from the regions whose abandonment was to be expected and transferred to the Reich in order not to allow it to fall into the hands of the Russians. The evacuation could only be carried out by foot marches in combination with convoys of hyper-mobile vehicles, since no other means were available. When the departure was carried out in due order, after the corresponding information, the difficulties were caused only by snowstorms or by occasional congestion on the roads. But often the departure took place in a disorderly manner, especially when unexpected setbacks occurred in a sector of the front or also when localities located at a great distance from the front were panic-stricken. Such convoys were not provided with the necessary food and fodder, sometimes not even with sufficient clothing. The entire population could not be taken at once to the west, as the capacity of the only road leading to the west allowed only a limited number of vehicles to be used at the same time. The parts of the population living in the front area had to be the first to withdraw. Confusion also arose if inhabitants living far from the front left by their own resolution and obstructed for a long time the roads for the parts of the population coming from the front.

Koch acknowledged that the movement of the convoys had exceeded the administrative forecasts and that the help already provided by the military authorities in disentangling, directing and supporting the convoys had been efficient. I learned finally that he had been expressly forbidden an evacuation of Königsberg; this could only be carried out otherwise, by boats, since very few of the city's inhabitants had vehicles, contrary to the rural population, and that such a long and difficult march could not be carried out without vehicles, especially by children.

In the afternoon I returned by taking the Haff road via Heiligenbeil to Zinten. The impressions I received were very gloomy. The 3rd Armored Army was, without any doubt, in a great crisis. And equally critical seemed to be the situation in the left wing of the 4th Army which followed. I still saw no means of saving it. The right wing of the 4th Army had attacked all day to the west and achieved small local successes. The army

intended to continue the attack on the 30th.

On the morning of the 29th I went to the XLI Armored Corps and a Division in the particularly threatened left wing of the 4th Army. The icy east wind was blowing with even greater violence; over the snow-filled plain there was a teeth-chattering cold. The great road leading east from Zinten was covered with convoys moving slowly westward; the movement was frequently interrupted by short halts. Many had spent the night on the road. An impression of weariness and resignation was produced by these tormented men. Nothing was noticeable of the firm will and the habit of optimism which I had ascertained in the first convoys after my landing at Heiligenbeil. And yet all of them must have nourished a great hope, otherwise they could not have endured these sufferings. In order to reach my first objective, I soon had to turn off the main road and take a side road.

Here I found a convoy of about 15 vehicles driven by an energetic woman of some age. The drivers were, without exception, French; they were the only men in the convoy. The woman told me that they had spent the night in barns in a nearby village where soldiers fed them at night and in the morning. On the night of their departure, they had been robbed of all their provisions; the perpetrators were probably Russian prisoners of war housed a short distance from them. Until then they had always found a village where they were helped by soldiers. Only one night they had to spend on the road, for they could neither advance nor retreat and in an extensive area around it there was not a single settlement. The next day they received tea from a field kitchen on the road, but nothing to eat. He spoke very highly of the French prisoners. He mentioned in passing that in the morning they found two dead children; they probably froze to death. At first I was displeased at the complete indifference with which he told me this; but when I saw in his tightly wrapped face the cold, hard eyes, I could suspect how deep his sufferings and pain must have been to arrive at such indifference. His convoy was to pass through the armored forces barracks at Zinten. I gave him a memorandum for the commander to deliver fourteen days' worth of supplies to his convoy. Filled with bitterness at these privations and misfortunes to which the people of East Prussia were subjected, I had to recall the care and concern that went into the evacuation of the Norwegians from the Finmark. It is true that here we were dealing with barely 40,000 people, while in East Prussia almost two million people were on the move.

The road soon led to a north-south road, which led to the big Zinten road. On this road one wagon after another had been stopped for an hour, according to what a driver told me. The convoy I found there was in a much better condition than the last one. It had been on the move for a few days. His main complaint was the intense cold and the long stops on the congested roads. It was evident that the great road through Zinten and Heiligenbeil, on which the convoys from numerous secondary roads converged, could not absorb all the great masses of wagons without causing them endless stops. It was necessary to intervene.

Well into the morning I finally arrived at the headquarters of the XLI Armored Corps commanding the left wing of the 4th Army. The enemy breakthrough of the previous day had been stopped in a new position. The Commanding General of the Corps, however, had little confidence in the resistance capacity of his front, since the frozen ground did not allow the construction of combat trenches, there were no obstacles and there was also a lack of reserves. The same impressions I also gathered in one of the Divisions of the Corps. I was able to reach them soon as the road in the vicinity of the front was free of convoys. These had already passed the day before.

When I returned to headquarters in the afternoon there were different resolutions to be made. I had been in East Prussia for two days and I knew that some more time would be required until I could master the dangerous situation with sufficient security. I had first of all come to the conviction that it would be impossible with the available forces to hold Königsberg and the other fronts at the same time, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to make the break westward in order to re-establish the connection with the 2nd Army. Since Königsberg had to be held at all costs, for this reason there was no other solution than to give up the attempt to re-establish the link to the west. This was already falling all the more of its own weight as it became known on that day that the 2nd Army in West Prussia was not in a position to act with adequate forces in our direction in such a way that the Russians in the Elbing area and further south could be taken by the two arms of a pincer. Still on the night of the 29th the 4th Army received the order to suspend the attack. Late in the evening an order was

received from Hitler to replace the commander-in-chief of the 4th Army, General Hossbach, by General Friedrich Wilhelm Müller. On the causes of

I had received no official communication about this change. I have reason to suspect that it was due to the abandonment, some time before, of the positions in the Lötzen area by that Army.

The more I reflected on the attempt at a break westward, the clearer it became that it could only have been carried out if the whole Army Group had been employed for that purpose, protecting it against the east and south. This would have forced the abandonment of East Prussia. But such an operation could promise success if it anticipated the countermeasures of the far superior enemy. It would have had to be carried out quickly and without delay. Among many other reasons, it was also impossible because all the roads were covered with the convoys of evacuees, which marched at an incomparably slower speed than the troop units. Whoever had the thought of breaking with all the forces to the west had, on the one hand, to proceed with inconsiderate energy against the convoys and to leave the population free to the Russians in the end. This, too, must be borne in mind by the superficial post-war writers who express their justified sympathy for the inhabitants with an ability that fills many pages, and in others violently criticize the resolution to hold East Prussia.

The consolidation of the front also required that the very protruding arch on the eastern front of the 4th Army, from which the population had already been evacuated, should be withdrawn to a position on its string. The two or three Divisions thus vacated were to be employed in support of the left wing of the 4th Army, thus creating the precondition for being able to counter a new crisis expected there. It had been found that the 4th Army, dominated mainly by the thought of the break to the west, had greatly neglected its left wing and its liaison with the 3rd Armored Army.

For the withdrawal from the arched position I had to request Hitler's authorization, as my predecessor had already had the same intention without obtaining his approval. In the knowledge of this I wrote a telegram in a very categorical tone and pointed out that the resolution on the necessity of the withdrawal could only be taken on the spot and that I considered it unavoidable. At the same time, I requested that the authorization be communicated to me by 7:00 p.m. at the latest, since the first movements were to begin that night. I received the authorization an hour later with the remark that it was not appropriate to submit a request in the form of a time-limited ultimatum. But I knew that I was right to proceed.

Other measures were related to the movement of convoys. On the most important roads, officers, NCOs and field gendarmes were employed, almost always in the area where their respective large units were billeted, with the task of ensuring that movement was not interrupted. When it was a question of halts of some duration, the vehicles had to go out to the secondary roads or to enter the nearby lands; it had to be avoided that several columns were formed or that they tried to surpass one another; the entrance of vehicles from the secondary roads to the main road had to be regulated. The number of field kitchens distributing hot drinks, soup or stew was increased, for which sufficient kitchens were available due to the disbanding of units because their numbers were too small. Sanitary posts were also created for emergency medical service.

The sappers of the 4th Army had already fixed and marked a path on the Haff ice. The road leading westward along the Nehrung was already in a very poor condition after a short time, as its infrastructure had not frozen to a sufficient depth due to the higher temperature caused by the proximity of the water. Hundreds of workers were employed to maintain this road, the only one leading to East Prussia. A sapper general was entrusted with responsibility for the road through the ice and the road over the Nehrung.

2. East Prussia

Fierce fighting for Samland and the Haff road.

Continuous Russian offensives against the 4th Army.

The purpose of the maintenance of the front in East Prussia was, in my opinion, threefold. First of all, there was the political purpose of holding Königsberg. Then it was necessary to hold the far superior Russian forces

so that they could not intervene in more sensitive places, and finally, only in that way could the departure of the population be assured, a movement which was to last for many weeks yet.

While work was being done to consolidate the front, a new crisis occurred in Samland. The Russians had begun the attack on January 29 and on that day and the next pushed back the right wing of the 3rd Armored Army to within striking distance of the eastern front of Königsberg and, pressing north of the city, pushed back the center and left wing of this army to near the western coast of Samlandia. They also attacked between Königsberg and Pillau to the south and cut the railway line and the road from Königsberg leading to Pillau. The retreating parts of the 3rd Armored Army formed a front north of Fischhausen and thus protected the Pillau area. Only weak forces still remained in the form of a bridgehead on the northern coast at Cranz and were still reinforced in time by forward units of the XXVIII Corps approaching from Memel via the Kurische Nehrung.

The development of the situation in Samland and the expectation of a Russian attack on Königsberg caused intense panic in the city, which gradually subsided. The Russians did not attack the city itself. Nor did they do so later at a very favorable time. They were probably impressed by the "Fortress", which in practice was never Königsberg. They tried instead to cut off the city's communications with the neighboring fronts.

This they achieved, in the first instance, in the north and west. Shortly after the attack on Samlandia, they launched a very powerful attack on the sector south of the city with the aim of reaching the Haff in order to isolate Königsberg also from the south and to cut off the land communication between the 4th Army and the 3rd Armored Army; but they did not succeed. We were able to organize a sufficiently strong front by using the 4th Army's forces destined for Königsberg, this front dominated a strip along the bank of the Haff, so that the road near the Haff leading to Königsberg could continue to be used. The situation there continued unchanged until my departure from East Prussia in mid-March. The Russians seemed to feel very uncomfortable in their position in the form of a salient arc in the form of a pocket south of Königsberg, for there they kept completely quiet and did not even try to interrupt the traffic on the Haff road by artillery fire; it is true that this road was, for the most part, out of sight from the Russian positions.

In the first days of February the XXVIII Corps, whose nucleus was the 58th Infantry Division, with good combat power, reached the Cranz area from Memel. The natural thought of using these forces in a break to the south, in the shortest direction over Königsberg, had to be abandoned, because above all the radiotelegraphic exploration proved a strong Russian concentration precisely in that area. It was to be expected a more reduced resistance in the southwest direction, the one leading to Fischhausen, all the more so since this direction would have to be surprising for the enemy. This operation was a complete success.

The Corps broke through the Russian device and formed a front passing from east of Rantau through the western part of Samlandia, relying on the forces of the 3rd Armored Army, which on this occasion were able to advance their positions considerably.

The success of this operation was the precondition for a further offensive action, which had as its objective the reconquest of Samland as far as Königsberg, at least the reestablishment of rail and road communication between this city and Pillau. I then resolved to carry out this new operation. It required very thorough preparations, which began immediately. Shortly afterwards I moved to Pillau. This city could not be reached at that time in a single leg. First I had to fly over the Haff to the Pillau airfield, situated a short distance from the northern end of the Nehrung. The town itself was on the other side of an arm of the sea, which forms the junction between the Haff and the open sea. When we crossed it in a large motor raft, we were already on the edge of Pillau, which, notwithstanding the disturbances of war, produced an impression of great cleanliness. I studied the action planned here with the people who were to direct them.

The positions of the 4th Army had been clearly consolidated by the withdrawal of the outgoing arc and by a partial change in the distribution of forces. One weakness lay in the fact that artillery ammunition was already becoming scarce.

188. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

For tanks, heavy anti-tank pieces and assault pieces, which gave excellent results in tank fighting, as well as for 8.8 cm anti-aircraft guns, there was enough ammunition. There was enough ammunition.

Shortly afterwards, preparations for a Russian offensive were observed on the Army's eastern front. The radiotelegraphic exploration which worked magnificently proved the arrival of rifle divisions, artillery divisions and sapper brigades, as well as the gathering of large tank units. The occupation of positions by numerous artillery, which for the most part escaped ground exploration, could be located, in a very detailed way, by this radiotelegraphic exploration. From the radiotelegraphic picture and the ground observation it was soon possible to deduce with great precision the center of gravity of the Russian offensive. Immediately, countermeasures were taken. It is true that the forces themselves allowed only the approach of small groups of infantry and some heavy batteries in the zone of attack. The batteries that were there received most of the ammunition, unfortunately reduced; numerous heavy anti-tank units, arranged in depth with abundant ammunition, were brought into position. The tactical conduction of the fight was in charge of the Commanding General of the XLI Armored Corps, very proven in previous actions. I remember here that the Group of Armies had commanders in chief and commanders of large units who were, without exception, a real selection of military conductors.

The enemy forces destined for this attack were powerful. Ours were only an aliquot part of the Russian ones. Since January 12 the Russians were almost always successful. They seemed to have a very energetic command and the units a greater offensive power than I knew them in 1943 in Central Russia. It was also natural that the many setbacks did not fail to exert an influence on our troops. Despite the efforts I had made to form an accurate picture of the spiritual state of the units, I finally had to tell myself that I had not succeeded. I had conducted many engagements up to that time, but none I looked forward to as anxiously as the one that was imminent. The factors of insecurity and the imponderables which, in the last analysis, play a part in all combat actions, were here too numerous and too great.

Two days after the Russian artillery radioed its readiness to fire on the superior commands, the attack began. In spite of the very economical consumption of ammunition, our artillery showed its mastery acquired in many battles, making short concentrations of fire with which it destroyed the enemy infantry in the rush or damaged it severely. While the thrust was taken away from the first attacking forces, new troops continued it. The artillery ammunition available was too small to provide the infantry with the usual support during the fight.

The Russian infantry managed to break through the weak line of defense in increasing numbers and finally forced it to retreat. The enemy was content, for a long time, with what had been achieved. Then hundreds of tanks approached with the purpose of turning the breakthrough into a breakthrough. They advanced into the deep zone of the heavy antitank defense; always new tanks followed and also infantry advanced from the conquered line. Then our assault guns advanced from their rear, almost always from a flank, against the advancing Russian infantry, dispersed them and, supporting the few available tanks, intervened decisively in the tank fight. Shortly afterwards the enemy tanks were also withdrawn. More than 100 enemy tanks were burned or abandoned by their crews on the battlefield. The losses of the enemy infantry were also very severe. Unfortunately, the losses of the infantry itself, which had to withstand the first shock of the enemy, were also considerable. The own forces were not enough for a counterattack. For this reason a new line was organized at a distance of 500 to 1,000 meters from the previous one. The Russians did not continue their attack. In this sector they managed to gain barely one kilometer. This combat showed that the front had been consolidated and that the troops themselves had regained their former firmness. It was precisely this verification that was of

extraordinary value to me in the future.

During this period preparations continued for the planned attack on Samlandia. The date of its initiation had to be postponed once because the ship bringing the ammunition supply had not arrived at Pillau on the announced date. It was finally fixed for February 19. On the morning of that day, the entire Samland front went on the attack. In the center of gravity fought the IX Corps with two Divisions (58th and 93rd); then to the south smaller forces advanced along the coast in an easterly direction. In Königsberg the eastern front was left sufficiently strong; all other available forces, the core of which was the 5th Armored Division with good fighting strength, attacked in a westerly direction.

The forces attacking in the railroad and road area from the west and east soon dislodged the enemy and established liaison between them. The troops advancing in the center of gravity made good progress until in the afternoon resistance became more tenacious. The attack resumed the next day succeeded in making further advances; but the fighting became more and more difficult. In a single Russian regimental sector alone 150 antitank pieces of all calibers were captured. Finally, fighting broke out on the Galtgraben heights, where the Russians had massed large forces. A continuation of the attack would have required a morose change in the disposition of the forces and, what influenced especially, would have cost losses that would not be justified, since the real objective of the attack had already been reached, that of reconquering the safe communication between the city and the port of Pillau, necessary for the defense and supply of the Königsberg area.

By dominating the southern coast of Samland, the traffic through the sea channel, important for the supply of the 4th Army, had also been secured. I ordered, therefore, the suspension of the attack and the defensive organization of the conquered terrain. We were horrified by the unheard-of cruelties committed by the Russians on the population of the regions occupied by them. A great exasperation seized all of us, especially the soldiers who, in the reconquered localities, were direct witnesses of the sufferings of the population. The units also found proclamations and newspaper articles in which the well-known writer Ilya Ehrenburg incited the Russian soldiers to commit the greatest imaginable cruelties to the population of the occupied German regions.

When in the years 1941 to 1943 I was in Central Russia I could see the extremely low standard of living of the great majority of the Russian people; but the inhabitants were not aware of it or only in a very vague form, for they lacked elements of comparison. So much the greater was the impression that the living conditions in East Prussia made on the Russians who arrived there. Numerous letters found among the prisoners and the fallen expressed their astonishment and admiration for the conditions in which the German peasants lived. The solidly built, neat houses, the "luxurious" and practical facilities, the beds with their large feather cushions, the abundant material, the great variety and quantity of provisions, all these constituted the main subject of the letters which often resembled accounts of the discovery of a new wonderland. In one letter it was said: "If I see the magnificence and wealth in which the Germans live, then I do not understand why they came to our country to take away our huts".

The reaction of the units in East Prussia, which collected observations on the life of the population, was not ignored by the Russian command. Thus, in an order of an Army Corps commanding general to the commanders of his subordinate Divisions, it was read: "We must try by all means to counteract the catastrophic impression that the way of life of the Germans produces in our soldiers. It must be explained to them that the Germans have only been able to afford this because they plundered everybody."

Shortly after the successful offensive in Samland I went via Pillau to Königsberg. The railroad had resumed traffic and on the road only a few traces made it possible to recognize the earlier fighting. The running water and electric light service was in operation even before the last fighting. The mass of the population remained in the houses and shelters, as long as they did not have to attend to their chores or make purchases. The Russians on the eastern front were quite inactive. On the other fronts they were much further away from the city. I visited the commandant at Königsberg who had his seat in a spacious shelter under the railroad directorate building. Everywhere I found a much more confident state of mind than on my first visit in January.

Then the defensive works on the eastern front were inspected; the trenches and the very wide, field-gun-proof shelters of the old fortress were used. I shared the opinion of the two Division commanders that positions with a determined defense were difficult to attack. On the return trip I visited the Divisions whose positions were north of Königsberg. The improvement of the positions was carried out under small local fights. Here, too, the Russians remained quite inactive.

In the 4th Army south of Königsberg, however, already during the fighting in Samland, the first signs of a new Russian offensive, this time in front of the area of the 6th Army Corps, were ascertained. It was again the radiotelegraphic exploration that rendered excellent services and on the basis of its results, related to those of the ground exploration, it was possible to determine with sufficient precision the Russian center of gravity. The form of the enemy's attack was the same as in the previous case. On our side, artillery ammunition was even more scarce. The Russians broke into the fighting position and tried to break through with large groupings of tanks and infantry. Here again the thoughtful and energetic combat leadership of the Corps succeeded in committing all the forces, albeit weak ones, with full effectiveness, and again it was the cooperation of all the guns and the courage of the units that forced the Russians to settle for the piece of position conquered, after the loss of numerous tanks; that piece of position represented in

the attack zone a very small gain in terrain.

The experience we gathered from the Russian command was for us quite stimulating. The reports I had received on the Russian leadership, especially in the summer battles in 1944, allowed us to deduce that the Russians had learned and applied something from their German adversaries. They showed then to have elaborated long-range plans for their offensives and an energetic execution of their intentions, even when they only pledged a great numerical superiority.

Russian leadership in East Prussia showed nothing of the sort, if one disregards the numerical superiority in terms of troops and materials. A conductor who is not up to his tasks, insecure, takes refuge in the scheme and rigid procedures. My opponent was the young Marshal Tscherniakovsky, who was the hope of the Russian high command for the future. The cause of the schematism and the lack of a broader conception in the Russian command I thought I saw in the inadequacy of the instrument at his disposal. The commanders showed no initiative and the units were poorly instructed. I knew that one's own success seems smaller if one belittles the enemy. He was far from denigrating or belittling the enemy, all the more so since his danger lay in his mass and quantity of material. He only sought to analyze the causes and relations in the manifestations of his command which, naturally, would not fail to influence his own measures. At the beginning of March we received the news that Tscherniakovsky had fallen a short distance from the front. Circumstances did not change under his successor.

At the end of February I moved the headquarters to the Heiligenbeil area. With growing concern I learned of the shortage of artillery ammunition. At the beginning of March we received only occasionally a couple of rounds per piece. Without the enemy making any great attack preparations, we were always losing pieces of positions again by numerous local Russian attacks, with heavy artillery fire support, as the infantry itself was hardly supported by artillery. For the same reason it had to be renounced to carry out counterattacks for their recapture, as the losses would have been too great. In an attack of some magnitude against the right wing of the XXVI Corps in the Haff area, in which the opponent also used many tanks, the small town of Frauenburg was lost. Being a canon of the Frauenburg college Copernicus in the 16th century, where he made his momentous discoveries that served as the basis for the new conception of the Universe.

The Russian attempt to drive tanks deep into the position to achieve decisive action also failed on this occasion, as we had sufficient ammunition for heavy anti-tank defense and parts of an anti-aircraft division achieved outstanding results in the ground fighting. A large number were shot down. The 4th Army front was gradually reduced. At the beginning of March the movement of convoys was still continuing. After several unsuccessful urgent requests for ammunition, I wrote to Hitler in a radiogram describing the situation in detail, stating that without sufficient ammunition we had to expect a continuous reduction of the front and finally its

complete disappearance. I then put the question as to whether the stated purpose for the maintenance of East Prussia continued to subsist. I did not receive an answer to the last question, but I did receive the assurance of the shipment of a relatively large quantity of ammunition within the next few days. We did indeed receive ammunition soon, albeit in insufficient quantity. That small quantity meant, however, a certain relief because at that time preparations for a new powerful Russian offensive were observed. The enemy chose this time the southern front of the pocket he had formed south of Königsberg, in the direction of the Haff. It was evident that he first sought to widen the pocket to the south and, by means of the protection thus obtained, would then try to break through to the Haff road in order to cut off the communication which still existed between the 4th Army and the Samland area. For weeks we had been expecting the continuation of the attack on the broad incoming road, for there the distance from the Russian front to the Haff was reduced; but the Russians did not launch the attack, worried about their flanks. Preparations revealed that the offensive would be on a very large scale. They had also assembled large armored groupings.

Our countermeasures were carried out within the framework of our limited possibilities. The western front had to be dangerously weakened in order to obtain at least small infantry reserves. The formation of one's own center of gravity also required drawing forces from other sectors to an extreme limit, which could still be justified. The fixing of this limit was all the more difficult the greater the disproportion between one's own forces and those of the enemy.

The initiation of the attack offered the usual picture. It was directed, as expected, against the southern front of the pocket. But the situation of the defender was made difficult by the fact that a part of his position passed along the edge of several small narrow woods and that by breaking into the position the attacker also had the way through the woods open to him. For the Russians the forest always possessed a great power of attraction. While in other cases they were content for a long time with the conquest of a position and only hesitantly continued the advance, here they immediately threw themselves into the interior of the woods. From our experiences in Russia we knew that the Russians, once they got into a forest, were very difficult to get out of it and it was only possible to do so with great consumption of artillery ammunition. For this reason, we had to give them two small woods, while from a third one they were dislodged by an immediate counterattack.

In this serious phase of attack, the enemy infantry was supported by tanks, of which many were shot down. This time the enemy was more tenacious and continued the attack the next day. His center of gravity was now oriented in the direction of the Haff and he employed for this purpose the largest number of tanks hitherto committed. When the new center of gravity of the enemy had been recognized, the Army Corps "Grossdeutschland", acting in that sector, was able to employ in time weak infantry units coming from the western front, on the threatened front. A large-scale fight then broke out between the attacking tanks and the heavy anti-tank defense and assault guns. In this fight 220 enemy tanks were shot down.

The Russians had also employed their heavy type tank, which they called "Stalin". One of them was shot down by a 7.5 cm. rejection gun behind our front; a second also broke through and was pinned behind the front in a swamp, being abandoned by its crew. These very heavy tanks moved relatively slowly; they had a thick frontal armor. Our experts studied this tank that intervened for the first time, and reported that also its strong frontal armor was easily pierced by the 8.8 cm. anti-aircraft gun or by the gun of the "Tiger".

This fight of several days did not bring the Russians the expected breakthrough as far as the Haff, but only a reduced gain of ground that did not lead to the interruption of the Haff road.

Even if these stormy days ended well, it was evident that the front south of Königsberg could only be held for a limited time because of the shortage of ammunition. Here there was only one solution: to bring the troops to Samland and with the port of Pillau at the back create favorable conditions for transport by sea to Germany. The shrinking zone of the 4th Army was to be held until the evacuation of the convoys was completed. This evacuation suffered delays and disturbances due to Russian airmen dropping bombs on the ice on some occasions. From the beginning of March, because of the warmer temperature, cracks appeared in the ice, so that the sappers had to build longer and longer stretches of roads with sashes and planks. It was already foreseeable

when the ice would no longer be able to carry the load. Therefore, efforts were made to bring as many convoys as possible to the Nehrung and leave them there until the opportunity arose to continue the march westward.

After the last fights were over I moved my headquarters to Fischhausen, about 10 kilometers north of Pillau. The move was convenient because the 3rd Armored Army Command leading to Samland had moved to West Prussia and because that locality was suitable for preparing and adopting the new projected device. At Fischhausen there were a number of simple houses, intended only for the summer; it was separated from the sandy beach of the Baltic Sea by a narrow pine forest. Further north is Palmicken, the center of amber mining, many centuries old.

Since I assumed command in East Prussia I have been so continually occupied by the setbacks on the still unconsolidated front, by the counterattack in Samland and by the various Russian offensives against the southern front at Königsberg, that I have not been able to reflect calmly on the general situation. We received from the Army Group in Curland and from the 2nd Army in West Prussia the daily reports; but from the OKW I received no official information about the situation at large. In this respect we were limited exclusively to the official communiqué, which, however, said a great deal. Nor did we know the purpose of the offensive in Hungary, although we assumed that the decisive factor in this decision was that the oil fields in Western Hungary were the only ones, with the exception of Zistersdorf (Austria), which were still in the hands of the Germans. I could not form a judgment as to whether the Oder line would withstand the Russian offensive which was to be expected with certainty. In any case, that line was to be considered sufficiently strong if it was to be attacked in Hungary. We assumed that negotiations were in progress with the Western powers, news of which sometimes leaked out, without there being any possibility of verifying them.

In connection with the maintenance of the Oder line arose the necessity of holding numerous enemy forces on the other fronts. In this respect, too, it was shown that ignorance of details necessarily leads to oversimplification of judgment. I would have considered as "desperate" the general who, in a situation of this nature, by his own actions, wanted to destroy a project of which he had no knowledge.

All these reflections and others ceased on March 12 when I received the radiotelegraphic order prescribing me to immediately assume command of the Group of Armies in Curland, where the sixth battle had begun. The command in chief of East Prussia passed to Colonel General Weiss, until then commander-in-chief of the 2nd Army, who arrived the same day.

Curlandia

Why was the Army Group left in Curlandia?

On the morning of March 13 I left the Pillau airfield. There was a light snowstorm, of which we were very glad, for the flight was passing in the vicinity of Memel, which this time was entirely in the hands of the Russians. It was the first time, in my numerous tasks in this war, that I was heading for a county whose circumstances were not entirely unfamiliar to me. I knew that here, too, in the great general crisis, it was a question of seizing superior forces from the enemy and thus preventing them from intervening in decisive places. For the holding of Curland there were neither the political motives nor the necessary consideration for the transfer of the population to be evacuated which determined the holding of East Prussia.

Guderian had proposed in January the evacuation of Curland and the employment of the forces there on the eastern front proper. That was still the most expedient thing to do at that time. The only military motive against that resolution was adduced by the naval war leadership that from the abandonment of the peninsula it expected a dangerous extension of the Baltic Sea dominion by the Russians. I could not find out whether that reason was the decisive one for leaving the Group of Armies in Curland. In any case, it had become worthless in March because of the occupation of new large stretches of the Baltic Sea coast by the Russians.

At that time the shortage of artillery ammunition which had arisen had changed the circumstances in another respect. With the experience I had gathered in East Prussia with regard to the ammunition and fuel situation, I had to tell myself that under such circumstances an employment and a fight of the Army Group taken out of Curland in another region could never attain the same effectiveness as that achieved in Curland by the holding of the Russian forces in that district. In other words: an employment of the troops of Curland elsewhere, in the material conditions produced, would never have compensated the disadvantage that would originate to leave free Russian forces that had practically unlimited means at their disposal. In East Prussia and Curland there were actually some 160 to 170 Russian Divisions, which, although heavily broken, were held by a much smaller number of German forces.

It would have been quite different if the German forces in Curland and since mid-March also those in East Prussia had been combat-powered troops, abundantly supplied with ammunition, material and fuel; then these forces, given the superiority of the German soldier and the German leadership could have been brought to valuable positive action in the decisive zones of the eastern front. But, under the given circumstances, they could only be given negative tasks. And therein also lay the *raison d'être* for the maintenance of Curland.

From these thoughts I was torn from my thoughts by the sudden appearance of the Curland coast through the fog. There was considerably more snow here than in East Prussia, where violent storms had cleared large parts of the territory of snow. The weather was also considerably warmer.

At noon I was at my now familiar headquarters in Goldingen. In my modest quarters in the former gardener's house everything seemed to me the same as I had left it. I had passed the period of my command in East Prussia; but I knew that I was again faced with a task of analogous difficulty. I found that in general the situation of the Army Group was unchanged. The chief of the general staff was General Foertsch, the younger of the two brothers; he did not

could have wished for a better collaborator. Army Group consisted of the 18th Army and, to the east of it, the 16th Army. The position began on the Baltic Sea, about 15 kilometers south of the port town of Libau; it then continued eastward across the peninsula to in front of the small town of Frauenburg, turned northeast there and reached northeast of the small town of Tuckum the coast of the Gulf of Riga. Libau was the supply port of the

Army Group. Here were facilities for large shipments. All other ports were small and lacked facilities. They were only of interest to the local fishery. For this reason the center of gravity of the Russian attacks was directed preferentially against Libau.

The new Russian offensive had begun two days before my arrival. Its manifest objective was, in the first place, the port of Libau. The Russians carried out the attack with numerous forces and great employment of material and ammunition. It failed totally in the face of the well-conducted defense of the firmly established front. The ammunition situation itself was somewhat better than that of East Prussia, as there were still some stocks from the quiet period of the positional warfare.

The day after my arrival, March 14, I was able to realize my intention of January 26 to visit the 18th Army and the 1st Army Corps, which were fighting in the center of gravity. I formed a picture of the measures for the defense prepared methodically in every detail and of the positions established very favorably on the ground. Russian attacks continued also on this day without success. In all commanders-in-chief and commanders of large units I found firm confidence. At that time I did not know the other sectors of the Group of Armies only on the basis of the letter but, for me, it was evident that none of them would have been in a position to resist a strong Russian attack with their forces alone, because the Group of Armies had been extremely weakened in the last months by the surrender of numerous Divisions for the continent. For that reason, already during the fights in Libau I tried to form on the spot an impression as to which forces could withdraw from this area after a decrease of the attacks. It was necessary to proceed very cautiously, because the Libau area was the most sensitive part of the whole front and, nevertheless, I could not do without proceeding in that way.

In the following days, the Russians gradually paralyzed their attacks. It was to be expected with certainty that they would choose another center of gravity. One of the most important tasks of the leadership was to recognize the new intention. The next was to enlist the forces to oppose the enemy's offensive intent. Forces and means could only be taken from sectors that were not likely to be attacked, already weakly occupied. Such a measure was always accompanied by great risks, for surprises were to be expected.

The timely recognition of the enemy's new intention was this time very difficult because, contrary to my experiences on the other fronts and ultimately in East Prussia, on the "1st Baltic Front" (army group), under the command in chief of Marshal Bragmanian, who was in front of us in Curland, a very severe radio discipline was observed. Because of this, for a long time the events and intentions of the enemy were kept from our knowledge. Good observation conditions soon made it possible to discover the first indications of a new offensive intention of the adversary, which pointed to a sector west of Frauenburg. The imprudent radiogram of the command of a large unit brought later the welcome confirmation of the correctness of our verifications and clarified to us at the same time that it was a question of a large unit taken out of the sector of Libau. This considerably lessened the annoying feeling I was experiencing at the withdrawal of forces from that sector from our side.

I visited the units in the area where the next attack was presumed to take place and found there the much expected

The occupation of excellently constructed positions was rare. In particular, the depth of the combat field was very well equipped with heavy weapons support points. The positions of the batteries located here and of the light anti-aircraft batteries intended to beat off aviation attacks at low altitude were organized as support points for the defense in all directions. The units that had long been occupying the positions were in much better condition than the troops fighting in East Prussia in precariously constructed positions on the deeply frozen ground.

On my trips to the front I could see that the topsoil had already softened considerably and that at daybreak only the upper part was frosted. This state did not yet create difficulties to movement on and off the roads; but it was to be expected that the thawing of the ground was going to spread deeper. Even though the snow in Curland was considerably higher than in the northern parts of Eastern Europe, it had not been a serious obstacle to fighting for some weeks before. I have never been able to ascertain the cause why the Russians went so late to

the attack; nor could I learn it from statements of the prisoners. The impression was also gathered that they did not wish seriously to hinder an eventual transport of the Group of Armies to the Continent. The movement of about twelve infantry and armored Divisions which had been taking place since January through the port of Libau, situated at a short distance from the front, did not at that time induce the Russians to make a large-scale attack on that area. Did they want to let the weakening of the Group of Armies progress as far as possible before launching an attack?

If the Russian leadership (and in this case it could only be the Russian Supreme Command) obviously did not attach importance to holding the German forces in Curland, why did it undertake the offensive that was being carried out? In any case, it is clear from the attitude of the Russian leadership that it would have been very pleased if the German forces had evacuated Curland without a fight, which could lead to the conclusion that keeping them in Curland for this reason was already the right thing to do. Since the Russians undertook the offensive very shortly before the beginning of the period of the mud which paralyzes all activity, it must certainly have counted on a very rapid success.

The new Russian offensive collided from the beginning with our center of gravity formed in a timely manner. The conduct of the Russians was here much more tenacious than in East Prussia. They continued their attacks for days at a time, even when they were unsuccessful and were always throwing new forces into the fray. Finally, the Russians extended their zone of attack to the east and shifted their center of gravity to Frauenburg. This locality, which was not very advantageously located for the defense, was lost in the end. This was the first success of the Russian offensive and was of no significance.

During the fighting, it was found that the increasingly soft terrain made movement increasingly difficult. After the capture of Frauenburg, the enemy again suspended the attack. We, however, counted on a resumption elsewhere. Again feverish work was done on its timely probing.

At that time, about the last week of March, I received a visit from the Latvian General Pangerski. I was struck by his strong resemblance to Marshal von Hindenburg. He was the president of the Republic of Latvia, recently created from what was left of Curland. A few days earlier I had heard of this intention and could only shake my head. This measure came two and a half years too late. Also at that time a reasonable self-government should have been organized early in the Ukraine and other occupied Russian regions. Himmler and the circle of political illiterates around him, who dreamed of the creation for their families of hereditary duchies in the East, did not allow such thoughts to flourish even then. I felt a deep compassion for the general, who seemed to be helpless and obviously distrustful of the task he had taken upon himself, but who could not bring himself to abandon it.

It was soon recognized that the Russians had chosen their new center of gravity to the east of the old one. In that sector there was also an SS Division made up of Latvians. The Latvians were certainly good soldiers, but they fell short of the qualities of the German soldier. We still managed to bring some batteries to this sector; soon after it was no longer possible to move a vehicle except on embankments of fajinas. The natural roads were gradually covered with mud half to three quarters of a meter thick. In the stubble fields, where until then no one had walked, pedestrian movement was already possible, although with some effort.

After several unsuccessful attempts, the Russians attacked in dense devices and managed to break through at several points of the position. The terrain behind the position was in some parts an area of muddy mud, in which not infrequently one sank to mid-thigh. One could not think of a counterattack. In the drier places, the Russians tried to gain ground by skillful infiltration, by groups, in which they were opposed by some small reserves. Also farther east, the Russians attacked against the Gulf of Riga by forming local centers of gravity and achieved some minor successes in only weakly occupied positions. Ammunition for the new batteries, which were made to go into position some distance from the sash embankments, had to be carried by arm; a man could carry only one shell and had to trudge painfully for hours in the mud. The time had come when the movement of forces on either side was no longer possible. The fighting gradually drowned in the mud. With the exception of minor breakthroughs at Frauenburg and further east, the front held. The Russian offensive had not achieved its objective.

This situation had arisen in the first days of April. Despite the more difficult living conditions created by the mud period, the commands and units hailed the forced halt to operations as a great relief. A quiet period of at least a month's duration could be counted on. But this was not to apply to me. On April 4, 1945, I received the order to report as soon as possible to the Führer's headquarters in Berlin. I learned of this order with great resignation. I tried futilely to find out what task could still exist for me in the existing situation.

Austria ***Difficult decollement in Libau***

At first there seemed to be no prospect of getting out of Curland by air. In the whole area there was no concrete runway. My two planes, as well as the other machines, were stuck in the mud up to the wheels. Finally a referee was found in spite of everything. North of Libau, near the beach, was a small airfield with sandy, permeable soil. His examination resulted in the conclusion that here the initiation of flight would be possible; but there, except for a few cargo planes, there was no suitable aircraft. For night flight over the Baltic Sea (the only one that came into consideration) only a multi-engine machine could be employed. It was then resolved to fly a Ju-52 to Libau from the Pillau airfield in East Prussia. The landing was awaited with great anxiety on April 5 in the morning. It was successful as well as the decolonization and landing tests. The machine was taken over by the crew of my Ju-52, under the command of a 1st lieutenant of the Luftwaffe, who was an excellent pilot. And it is undoubtedly to him that I owe the safe return to Germany.

We had to miss a Russian air raid over the port of Libau and left shortly after 23:00 on a starless, very dark night. The flight was to be made first to Bornholm and from there to Rangsdorf in Berlin. Shortly after the start of the trip I saw how the radio operator began to disassemble his apparatus; then he reassembled it, repeating this again and again. Finally this activity ceased. The radio instruments no longer worked. We flew by compass only. After about an hour and a half we saw the red lights below us. It was Bornholm airfield. The pilot described a large arc and launched a white luminous rocket; it was the regulatory signal for this day, indicating intention to land. After repeating this maneuver, many lights went out. The pilot then turned southwest and tried then, also only by compass, to reach the Anzing airfield, near Stettin. After about half an hour we saw again two red lights. White luminous rockets indicated here again the intention to land.

Our tension was at its maximum. The fuel would not reach us until it cleared; but, soon after, two more lights shone, then two more, and so on until the whole runway was illuminated. We were glad to land. From Bornholm a report had been received that a suspicious enemy aircraft was trying to induce the runway lights to be turned on with a view to proceeding with the dropping of bombs. The person who had arranged for such an action did not even recognize the characteristic flying noise of the German Ju-52 aircraft. If Anzing had been influenced by this stupidity, we would probably have lost our lives in the fall. At dawn we continued our flight and at 07:00 on April 6 we landed at Rangsdorf, near Berlin.

The last time I had seen Berlin was about three months earlier. The destructions had continued in that time. The journey through the ruined streets of the city and its environs had something disconsolate about it. One wondered what such destructions had to do with the conduct of the war. And it continued every day, even though the adversaries for more than a year claimed to have won the war.

The meeting with Hitler took place only in the evening. Headquarters was at that time in the spacious shelter under the Reich Chancellery. The destruction in the vicinity

but the facade of the building was almost unscathed, as was the large entrance hall. I took a look at the mosaic hall; a bomb had caused great damage there. It then went down to a good depth until it reached the shelter in which there were numerous rooms. It could withstand even very heavy bombs. I waited in a small room in front of the meeting room. Shortly afterwards a door opened and Hitler appeared; his physical decline was evident; his posture was now stooped, he was limping somewhat with his left leg and holding his left forearm with his right hand. The clear and lively expression in his eyes was striking.

In the center of the meeting room was a large table with maps. Hitler spoke with exactly the same clarity and

thoughtfulness and with exactly the same firm intonation as on all previous occasions. I recall here the numerous publications, including those due to the pen of people in Hitler's "entourage," which appeared after 1945, and which speak of his spiritual collapse in the last year of the war. Such statements are absolutely inaccurate. During the time that I was present at the meeting, he did not show any element of judgment to deduce that the obvious physical decline had also reached the spirit.

Hitler immediately went on to refer to my new mission. I was to take command of Army Group "South," which, as Hitler said, was retreating in Hungary until then and there was no way to stop it. The most important tasks were now to stop this army group and to prevent the Russians from penetrating into the Alps and advancing into the Danube valley. Every effort had to be made to hold Vienna. He then spoke about the defense of the Oder line, which he considered very strong, as well as about the situation of Army Group "Center", which was still south of that line and was in Silesia and Czechoslovakia. I was especially interested to know the circumstances in which the latter group of armies found itself, since Army Group "South" was its neighbor and was linked with it in the Waag valley north of Trentschin. The Russians were still regarded as the main enemy. The adversary in the west was to be met with only a delaying resistance, even if all bridges, roads and means of transport were to be destroyed even in the retreat from him.

From the Baltic Sea to southern Slovakia it seemed to be quite calm. This evident "calm before the storm" was all the more impressive to me, the less I was in a position to form a personal judgment on the relationship of the forces of the two sides. Hitler was utterly confident; Jodl raised his shoulders when I looked at him under questioning.

In the Oder region, the Russians had already been working for two months, an incomprehensibly long period, on preparations for the continuation of their offensive. In several sectors of Army Group "South", the situation was confused.

After the conversation with Hitler, I went to the OKW Conduct Division and tried to fix the most important details on the basis of the latest reports.

Of the four armies of the Group of Armies, the southern one, which was the 2nd Armored Army, and the 6th Army, which was immediately to the north of it, were withdrawing from Hungary in front of the Russians who were pressing them and approaching the Austrian border. The 2nd Armored Army maintained a bridgehead at Varazdin on the Drave for liaison with the retreating forces in Croatia. In the region north of the Semmering, the 6th Armored Army followed, which was east of Vienna and in the southern part of Lower Austria, fighting against significant Russian attacking forces. Further north, the 8th Army was in western Slovakia and the Marchfeld. Behind these Russian groupings were, according to the latest reports, an armored army, a motorized army, and a foot army south of the Danube on the march on Vienna. Its most advanced parts had reached Schwechat on April 4 and, shortly afterwards, also the eastern borders of Vienna. For the defense of Vienna only two Armored Divisions were available, which had suffered greatly in the fights in Hungary, and some small groups.

The Russians had built a bridge at Hainburg over the Danube, across which they directed forces to the Marchfeld. With these forces the 8th Army, the army of the left wing of the Group of Armies, had already come into contact. In its other sectors in the March and Waag it was quite calm.

From this situation it was clear that the Russian center of gravity was directed against the Vienna area and that the enemy had committed forces of considerable strength in that direction. I did not know whether Hitler, in his analysis of the situation, was already aware of the advance of the armored, motorized and foot armies against Vienna. In any case, it was clear to me that a holding of Vienna would have required the organization of a defense established at a suitable distance to the east of the city and that in view of the combat situation and the railway conditions, already for reasons of time, it was not possible to effect a change of disposition in order to oppose the Russian center of gravity there. The adoption of this new device, in anticipation of the Russian center of gravity to be expected with all certainty, should have been initiated already much earlier during the movement from Hungary. I did not know why this had not been done. Perhaps also the conditions of the struggle would not have permitted it. By the second week of April it was already too late for that purpose.

Vienna was very close to the front line. I felt the tragedy of this great city with its own characteristics, to which I felt very attached, exposed to the onslaught of enemy armies, as several times before in the distant past. But this time the circumstances were different. The fate of a future development did not now depend upon the maintenance of Vienna. It was not possible to abandon Vienna at once, because express orders were opposed and because it would have made the situation of the 8th Army north of the Danube untenable. From the beginning I had the firm thought that the fight for the city should be shortened as far as circumstances permitted.

About the possible or projected way of concluding the war I could know nothing. For me, the object of the struggle in my area was to keep the Russians as far away and for as long as possible so that they would not penetrate into our region. I was firmly determined to carry out that intention with great energy and by all means. The depressing thing was that the fight would inevitably have to be fought on the soil of my homeland, Austria, partly already in its border regions.

Although the exigencies of the struggle would impose the measures, it was a matter of course for me that, wherever possible, the preservation and care of the country and its inhabitants had to be considered first. And so it was done, many times also passing to a second place the military conveniences. I found the greatest understanding in the army commands and in the units.

The Headquarters of Army Group "South" was in the small town of St. Leonhard, situated on the edge of the Alps, southwest of St. Pölten in Lower Austria. At midnight 6-7 April I left Berlin by car. The auto entrance was not to be used during daylight because of enemy planes. The trip on the common roads lengthened it considerably.

Towards midnight on April 7-8 I arrived at my headquarters. Since my departure from Berlin the situation had continued to develop. The 2nd Armored Army and the 6th Army had approached the eastern border of Austria and were engaged in combat there. In the area of the Styria-Lower Austria border the situation was confused. In Lower Austria the Russians, in combat against units of the 6th Armored Army, had passed Neunkirchen and Wiener-Neustadt. Gatherings of enemy forces continued in the area of the mouth of the March; their objective was evidently the Zistersdorf oil region. The 8th Army directed towards this region the weak forces it still had at its disposal. The Russians were also pressing upstream on the Danube with the clear intention of encircling Vienna from the north.

On April 7, the Russians had reached the "Gürtel" ("The Waist") in Vienna. The "Führer's Armored Division" arrived in the city. By Hitler's express order it was diverted from its march to the 8th Army, to which it was originally destined, and placed at the disposal of the commander of Vienna; the latter used it in an attack to the south and the division managed to break through the ring of the Russian encirclement and overrun the city limits. In the recaptured area there were numerous hospitals, which contained a large number of wounded and sick from the previous period, who had already fallen into the hands of the Russians. They were immediately taken by sanitary trains north of the Danube and transported westward. The Vienna Fire Brigade rendered extraordinary services on this occasion, for with all its vehicles it made itself available for the transfer of the wounded.

The intervention of the new Armored Division, with all its combat power in Vienna, shows that the fight for this city could have been prolonged for a long time, in spite of the great numerical superiority of the Russians. This was contrary to my intention to which the 6th Armored Army fully adhered. Opposed to this intention was the development of the combat situation on the northern bank of the Danube. Here the Russians employed especially powerful forces for the dangerous advance along the Danube to the west. The 6th Armored Army, whose northern limit passed 15 kilometers north of the river, in this area had only weak forces that could not withstand the enemy's pressure. There was a danger that it would break the link with the 8th Army on the Marchfeld and, in addition, that Vienna would be encircled in the north. Both dangers were to be avoided at all costs.

As no other forces were available, units had to be taken out of Vienna. The strongest organic grouping was

200. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

the Führer's Armored Division. In the course of April 8 it was moved out of the city and taken to the northern bank of the Danube. This was my first order given in the Army Group and was intended to shorten the fight for Vienna. The reaction it produced at the Führer's headquarters was very great. I was only able to calm it by indicating that the alternative was a splitting up of the Army Group and a complete encirclement of Vienna. The Russians followed immediately behind and still on April 8 they reached the Ring, that is the avenue around the city center of Vienna.

When I took over the Command-in-Chief of Army Group "South", there was a directive from the Führer which, among other things prescribed:

"The Russians will be presented with a decisive resistance and the Western adversaries with a delaying one. In front of both adversaries all bridges and works and means of communication will be blown up. This is the duty of all military commanders; the destruction and paralysis of industrial works is the task of the gauleiter and the corresponding organs of the economic service. The military authorities will provide the assistance required for this purpose. The blowing up of the bridges over the Danube at Vienna will be ordered personally by the Führer."

The western boundary of Army Group "South" ran along the Passau-Hallein line (exclusive) and then generally continued along the Tauros railway on the northern border of Carinthia. On assuming command I learned that all road and railroad bridges in the area of the Army Group were already loaded and ready to be blown up, as prescribed in the Fuehrer's order, which was carried out by military organs and partly also by organs of the Party service. By virtue of this order almost all bridges throughout Germany were blown up, also in front of the Western adversaries. Even though in my area the order had reached the lower commands, the fulfillment of the Fuehrer's orders by the units was self-evident, and even though in the regions where there were no military units this obligation passed to the Party organs, in consideration of the tasks of the gauleiter as commissars of the defense of the Reich, I decided not to permit the blowing up of any bridges. I saw in the suspension of the blowing up of bridges, together with the halting of the Russian advance, the greatest service I could still render to the Reich.

country in this situation.

Referring to the possibility of sabotage and to the explosion shortly before of the charges placed under the drawbridge over the Traun by a lightning strike, I ordered the charges to be removed immediately from all bridges and made it dependent on my express permission to reload and blow them up. I was particularly fond of the Danube Bridge at Linz, where I also took measures to ensure that in no situation should it ever be blown up.

In spite of the objections that were presented to me in many cases, I maintained without exception the fulfillment of my orders. Only a few bridges were left loaded which were in the immediate vicinity of the front fighting the Russians and whose unscathed possession by the enemy would have had catastrophic consequences for the units of the Group of Armies. The Vienna bridges were beyond my jurisdiction. When, on the occasion of the approach of the Americans, I was presented with several requests to blow up bridges, I did not agree in any case, nor did I accede to the request of the units defending the Semmering area to destroy a tunnel leading to the position or the viaduct that followed. In this way all the bridges to the west of the fighting front against the Russians were preserved and the destruction of great values was avoided.

The Inn River was outside my area. The bridges across it were destroyed. But I was able to prevent the dam built in its lower course from being blown up; the units in the neighboring zone had missed the blowing up of the dam. The bridges over the Salzach in Salzburg, also outside my zone, were not blown up on the city commander's own initiative at the approach of the Americans.

The Russians had meanwhile arrived from the south on the Danube at Nussdorf and Kritzendorf (upstream of Nussdorf) and had encircled Vienna also from the west. Shortly before, they had come through the Prater (the Prater is a park on the right bank of the Danube in the eastern part of Vienna, between the Danube Canal and the Danube River) in the vicinity of the railroad bridge. The fighting space was getting narrower and narrower and

this eventually led to the bridge at the Prater and the bridges at Florisdorf being in danger of falling into enemy hands. Possession of these bridges would have put the Russians in a position to reach the backs of the troops fighting on the Marchfeld and cut off the garrison of Vienna. For this reason the Florisdorf railway bridge was blown up by special order of the OKW. The neighboring road bridge, whose use was restricted due to heavy bomb hits, was otherwise unharmed. On the other hand, the railway bridge at the Prater was blown up by the units in the fighting.

In addition to the barely usable Florisdorf Bridge, the only remaining bridge in the Vienna region was the large road bridge, which bore the name "Reich Bridge".

This bridge was indispensable, first of all, for the evacuation of Vienna; on the other hand it was doubtful, in view of the expected development of the combat situation on the Marchfeld in the foreseeable future, whether it still had the importance for the 8th Army that the other Vienna bridges had hitherto had. Even though the blowing up of the Vienna bridges had been expressly removed from my authority, I considered it my duty to prevent the blowing up of this monumental bridge unless it was unavoidably necessary from a military point of view or premature. Since the "Reich Bridge", like all other bridges, was loaded and ready for blowing up, I ordered on April 9 that the load be immediately removed from this bridge. The next morning the 6th Armored Army reported the fulfillment of this order. It was later proved that without this measure this bridge would not have been saved from being blown up either.

On the night of April 9-10, the central part of Vienna was evacuated. The Danube Canal was occupied by rear-guards as a bridgehead in order to ensure the evacuation of the wounded and to cover the march of the troops across the Reich Bridge to the north. In the afternoon of April 12 the bridgehead in the vicinity of the "Reich Bridge" was withdrawn. The OKW ordered the blowing up of this bridge at the last moment when it was already under enemy machine-gun fire. Under such conditions, the placement of the many hundreds of kilograms of heavy explosive charge was not possible and thus the blowing up of the bridge was prevented. On the night of April 12-13 the last rearguards evacuated the southern bank of the Danube. On that date the Americans had reached Regensburg with their advanced troops.

Because forces had been used from the beginning for the defense of Vienna, which were held there, no troops were available to cover the area west of Vienna between the Danube and the foothills of the mountains. The 701st Infantry Division, transported from Italy and initially destined for Vienna, was therefore directed to that area. The sector was too large and, moreover, important parts of the division could not be expected to arrive within 8 to 10 days. For this reason, the armies in Styria sent the first mobile forces, composed of two strong scout detachments, one of an Armored Division and the other of a Motorized Division, some small groups as well as artillery and heavy anti-tank units. While the Russians were engaged in the encirclement of Vienna, it was possible to build up a front of some fighting strength on the approximate Atzenbrugg-Neulengbach line and to establish contact with the forces defending the mountainous region.

Shortly after the fighting in Vienna was over, the Russians attacked the front between the Danube and the foot of the mountain with far superior forces. In fighting lasting several days, the Russians succeeded in driving him back step by step between the Danube and Willhelmsburg to the other side of the Traisen, where his attack was finally stopped. The Russians also attacked with great intensity the narrow bridgehead of Tulln with the object of seizing the bridge there. The garrison was forced to retreat to the north bank of the Danube and blew up the bridge, situated well behind the 8th Army.

North of the Danube, the 8th Army had retreated, fighting fiercely, from the Waag valley to the Thaya River and then to the hilly region west of this river. The center of gravity of the Russian attack was directed at first against the Zistersdorf area. Shortly after the passage of the Danube at Hainburg, the Russians had also advanced from the south against the oil area. The 8th Army carried on the fight with great energy and for a long time did not concede the slightest success to the far superior enemy. Oil was still being transported to the refineries in Central Austria. Shortly after the fall of Vienna, the powerful pressure of the enemy finally forced, in conjunction with the events in the northern neighbors, to withdraw the army on the Nikolsburg-Zistersdorf-Mistelbach-Ernstbrunn line.

202. Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic

The OKW then reinforced the 8th Army with the 6th Armored Division with the mission to recapture the space lost at Zistersdorf. The command of the 8th Army and the Army Group Command were against the intention of a counterattack, as more and more Russian forces, among them also the Russian 6th Armored Army, were pouring into the Marchfeld. This armored army soon intervened, attacking with a center of gravity through Mistelbach with the obvious intention, once the breakthrough was achieved, to fall on the backs of the German forces fighting in Czechoslovakia. In very fierce fights, lasting several days, in which 150 Russian tanks were destroyed, it was possible to prevent the breakthrough, in spite of the great superiority of the enemy in personnel and material. In this battle of great proportions it was shown that the energy of the units and their leaders remained unshakable.

In Southern Lower Austria the Russian attack was stopped partly at the foot of the mountain and partly shortly after penetrating into the mountainous region. In the border region between the Wechsel mountain range and the Drave the Russian offensive had been stopped after difficult fighting. Later the Russians attacked repeatedly; but they only managed here and there some unimportant gains of ground here and there. More difficult was the situation immediately south of the Wechsel mountain range, where a Russian cavalry corps supported by armored forces penetrated quite deep into the valleys of the Sassnitz and Feistitz in Northern Styria. The situation there was at first critical, for a frontal counterattack along the valley did not promise prospects of success and in such terrain it was difficult to bring convenient forces to suitable starting areas. The enemy was finally driven back as far as the Wechsel by a pincer attack from the heights.

The Russians then tried, by means of attacks undertaken with great energy, to seize the Semmering. There, too, the situation became extremely difficult and could only be maintained by taking a Division out of the Central Styrian front and bringing it into the Semmering. It was not easy for me to make the resolution for that measure, for the front in that border region of Styria was exposed to powerful attacks. After the middle of April, south of the Danube the situation gradually calmed down. The Russians were evidently exhausted. They failed to reach their objective (which we later came to know was the boundary between Lower and Upper Austria).

In the last period of the war we learned that our enemies expected to find a region of the Alps organized as a fortress. I know that at one time the creation of a "Fortress of the Alps" was projected. But it never went beyond an intention. In any case, nothing had been done in that direction when I arrived in the Austrian region. The units themselves built their positions on the eastern edge of the Alps.

Since mid-April only rarely was aerial scouting still carried out. In the second half of April it was possible to observe the extraordinary fact that the Russians were building up a defensive position about 20 kilometers deep in front of the Group of Armies. We could not discover the reason for that measure since the Russians could certainly not count on an offensive on our part. Also surprising was the demand on their units and the civilian population to build anti-aircraft defense works and bomb shelter ditches, although no German fighter plane had been in the air for many weeks and no German air attack was to be expected.

In the last days of April, in the greater part of the Russian front south of the Danube, propaganda began on loud loudspeakers, in which again and again the phrases were repeated: "The greatest betrayal in world history is being prepared. If you do not want to continue fighting with the capitalist powers against us, come with us". We racked our brains over these events. The communication from the OKW about a political termination of this war was always before my eyes. In the final analysis, we were to gather the impression that the Russians were counting on the Western powers now turning against them.

The Americans, in the meantime, had arrived at the end of April with an Armored Division at Passau; there they found the bridge destroyed and the bank defended. Faced with such a situation, they turned north of the Danube to the east. Shortly afterwards two American semi-motorized Divisions passed the Salzach at Salzburg and advanced slowly eastward without encountering any resistance worth mentioning. Here a remarkable picture presented itself, which suited the mystery posed by the attitude of the Russians. At Lambach the Army Group had a large supply depot. In that depot the columns of my armies loaded flour at the same time as the columns of the Americans. The German columns then proceeded along the Reich route to Linz, in parts mixed with the Americans, and arrived unmolested at the places of delivery.

In order to avoid the chaos that would ensue if the Americans reached the back of the Group of Armies in front of the Russians, when the Russian attacks south of the Danube diminished, I proceeded to take out several Divisions that I had ready against an intervention of the Americans. I wanted to let the Americans get close to Linz and the Enns. From

Here they would be about 100 kilometers away from the eastern front in Lower Austria. Further south, in the mountains, only weak American forces were expected to advance. An Armored Division north of the Danube was moved to the area northeast of Linz and two Armored Divisions as well as a Hunter Division to the western part of Lower Austria south of the Danube with security forces on the Enns. I had managed to complete each of the Armored Divisions with 65 "Tiger" and an equal number of "Panther", mainly from the tank workshops in Linz, and bring them to full manning strength. I prohibited the defense of Linz, which had been planned and prepared for several months. As the Americans were advancing more rapidly on the northern bank of the Danube than on the southern bank, a small bridgehead had to be maintained on the northern bank until the forces in Upper Austria south of the Danube reached the Enns. The city forces were also withdrawn to the Enns. Linz was evacuated on May 4 without combat. Among the works in the city scheduled to be destroyed was the telephone exchange; the explosive charges were removed from all of them, simultaneously with the unloading, on all bridges, of the elements for their blasting. All blasting was forbidden to the units.

On May 1 we received the news of Hitler's death. It did not come unexpectedly, for the situation in the battle of Berlin was known. It was seen as a certain logical consequence and, for that reason, the news was also received calmly. The appointment of Admiral Dönitz as his successor aroused satisfaction.

On the front of the Group of Armies no changes were made; its cohesion remained unchanged and discipline remained firm, unchanged. From the political point of view, Hitler's death precisely at that time was regarded as a relief of the situation. Speculation about the possibility of joint action with Western adversaries was gaining ground.

South of the Danube, the Americans reached the Enns and did not attempt to advance beyond this waterway to the east. North of the Danube an American 11th Armored Division advanced eastward through Linz and clashed here with the 3rd SS Armored Division destined to secure that area. On the morning of May 6, a brief and intense engagement ensued, which was broken off by the Americans. They withdrew to the west. Nowhere on the front of the Army Group "South" did the eastern and western adversaries come to blows. This became possible only after the armistice.

The situation was urgent to reach a decision. With the OKW we could not even communicate by radio. On the basis of earlier directives, it was foreseen that in the event of a separation between the north and the south of the Reich, Marshal Kesselring, who at that time commanded the Army Group in Italy, should by virtue of a special order assume the higher command in the south. Such an order never came. I spoke by telephone on May 5 personally with the Marshal, who was, I believe, in Carinthia; but he, too, was not informed of the situation at large. I resolved, therefore, to clarify at least the questions connected with the communications received from the OKW some time before about the termination of the war and those resulting from the attitude of the Russians.

I sent General Patton, who commanded the 3rd U.S. Army, parts of which were behind me, to General Gaedke, Chief of Staff of the 6th Army, with a note requesting the former to allow sanitary material which was somewhere in the west to be transported through his forces to mine. The document then stated that the General also had a mission to deal verbally with other matters. These other matters concerned the request to let forces somewhere in the west pass through the American lines in order to support my eastern front. The General, who traveled under the parliamentary flag, was addressed in the first instance to the XX U.S. Armored Corps, whose Command was at St. Martin, Upper Austria. The Corps was commanded by General Walker, who later, as commander-in-chief of the 8th U.S. Army in Korea, had a fatal accident.

The General expressed to my envoy that General Patton was still in Frankfurt and that he would take care of

the telephone transmission of that matter. He had General Patton's authorization given to open the envelope and read the text to him. General Gaedke then presented him with the request concerning the advance of forces across the American lines. The reply was: "How can you imagine that I could allow troops to pass through my front destined to fight against our allies?"

When on the evening of May 6 General Gaedke returned, he brought the desired clarification. I resolved then to end the war in my zone. I could not communicate with the OKW. At that time I did not know that OKW negotiations with the adversaries were imminent. I found out about them and about the conditions of capitulation on 08:00 in the morning, at a time when I myself was already a prisoner.

I then issued my last two orders. One of them ordered the suspension of hostilities to the Divisions employed in the security of the backs against the Americans, on May 7 at 08:00. A similar order given to the troops on the eastern front would probably have led there to a disorderly disbanding of the front with all the consequences resulting therefrom. To the four Armies employed on the eastern front I ordered, for that reason, that at dusk on May 7, after dark, they should fall back to the west. In this last military action it was shown how firm the soldiers were, up to the last moment, in the hands of the Command. Still once again the units showed their high discipline and great tactical skill. With the usual mastery, they effected the detachment of the enemy. Only in two armies was it noticed by the Russians and after 24 hours. A Division of hunters then covered in twenty-four hours 100 kilometers on foot march. Only further north of the Danube the detachment was not achieved, because the forces were engaged there in violent combats.

In this way it was achieved that at midnight on May 9, when the capitulation treaty of the OKW with the Allied adversaries came into force, and more than 600,000 men of the Army Group were already prisoners of the Americans, some 200,000 men must have escaped being taken prisoner because of the marches, since the Russians, in very agitated negotiations with the Americans, claimed to have practically not taken prisoners from my Army Corps. They demanded the surrender of all the prisoners belonging to Army Group "South", including myself, and based this on the fact that they were entitled to these prisoners in accordance with the stipulations of the capitulation. General Patton refused this request.

If these stipulations (of which I learned when I was already a prisoner) had found the Group of Armies in its initial situation, then every single man would have had to surrender to the enemy who was precisely where he would be found. In such a case, the number of German soldiers who would have been taken prisoner by the Russians would have increased by about 800,000.

I personally resolved to start my trip on May 7 after noon to report to the commander-in-chief of the 3rd U.S. Army to discuss the formalities of the capitulation of the Army Group.

On May 6, when the resolution had already been taken to cease fighting, an American armored scouting detachment with 30 vehicles had passed the Enns and with some vehicles also reached Waidhofen in Bis, where my last HQ was located. It was here in the area of an SS Armored Division. I ordered not to put any obstacle in the way of the Americans. Their chief paid a visit to my Chief of Staff and the latter described him to me as a very tactful person, who was undoubtedly somewhat surprised by the forces among which he had got himself. I then had him ask him to report to the commander of his Division, billeted at Steys, about my planned trip.

On May 7, immediately after noon, the arduous journey began. Even when an event is foreseen long beforehand, its weight is only felt when it actually occurs. That weight, in turn, is lightened if the event does not come as a surprise. I have severely avoided showing my subordinates the painful feelings that afflicted me in difficult situations. Even if the nature of my feelings in this path, the most painful that a military leader can follow, is fundamentally different from that of critical war situations, I did not want to deviate from this rule of conduct, all the more so because I also wanted to observe it in front of the enemy until then.

In Steyr I was received with military honors by the General who commanded the American Division stationed there. He then accompanied me to the XX Armored Corps, to St. Martin, with whose commander, General Walker, I had established contact the day before on the occasion of the note to General Patton. As General Patton was still in Frankfurt I had no objection to Walker, who had telephone communication with

Patton, transmitting the negotiations. These were soon fixed in their main lines. It seemed to me plausible to demand that the capitulation with the three adversaries should appear on paper.

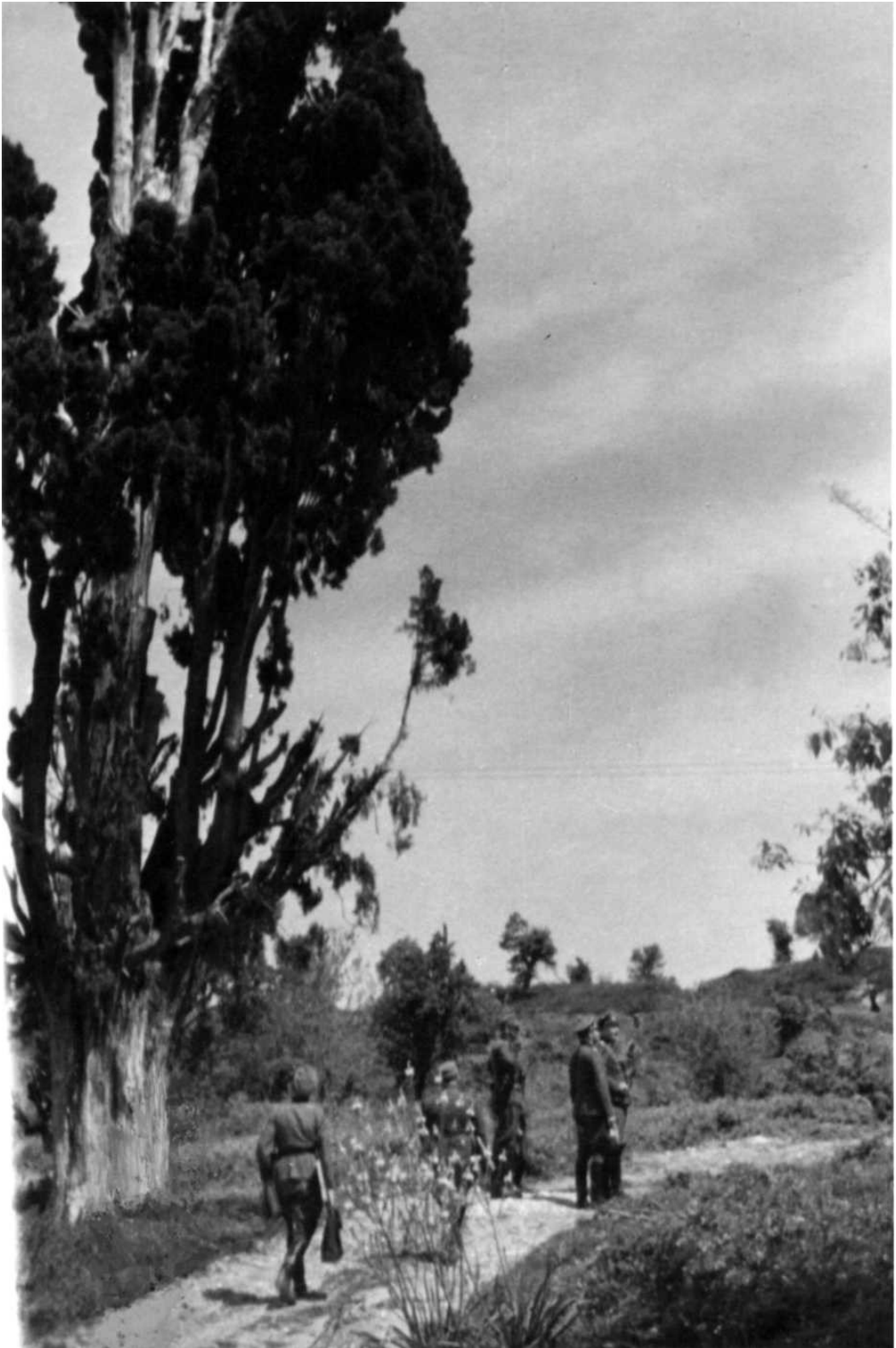
General Walker was a native of Texas, as he related to me, and also had the lively temperament of the Texans. While the stipulations of the capitulation were being drawn up in writing, we had time for a long conversation. Walker was interested in the circumstances that contributed to the rise to power of National Socialism in Germany. His knowledge and arguments on this subject were the usual ones of American propaganda. Suddenly and suddenly he asked me: "Now you can tell me, what did your note to Patton really mean? We have been racking our brains to find out its purpose". When I clarified to him the meaning of the note, which was to determine whether the suspicion that the Western powers would now go together with us against the Russians was accurate, he became very serious and said that a colonel on his staff had also interpreted it in that way. We talked for a long time afterwards still about this problem, about the importance of which the Americans had a reduced understanding. I finally said to him:

"If we were to proceed jointly today, we could push the Russians, completely exhausted, back beyond their frontiers. If the future does not spare you a definition with Russia, you will find yourselves in an incomparably more difficult situation, especially if Germany is disarmed. You will always remember this hour.

















N^o PI 633 Neresuho

Brac

6 - VI - 44

Dear Captain,

Just a short note
to thank you & your men, down
here, for our correct treatment
during our stay with you.

The food was rather short, &
less than we are used to, but
that could not be helped under
the circumstances.

I hope that, after the war, we
shall meet again, & in any case
should you at any time find
yourself in England ^{or Scotland} do ring up
HELENSBURGH 22'2 or GERRARDS CROSS
2120, where you will find me, & I hope will
dine with my wife & I.

Farewell.

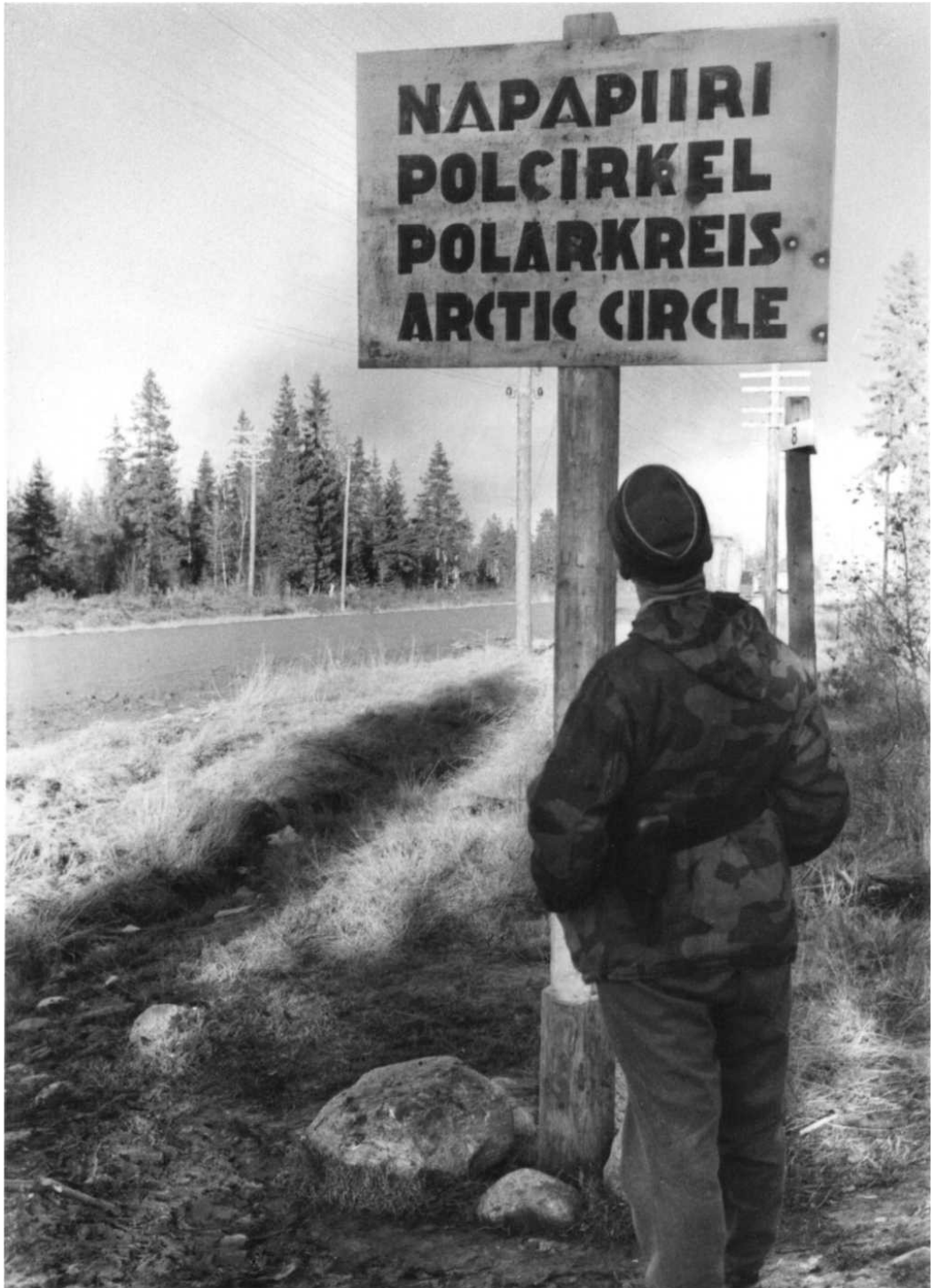
Jack Churchill.



























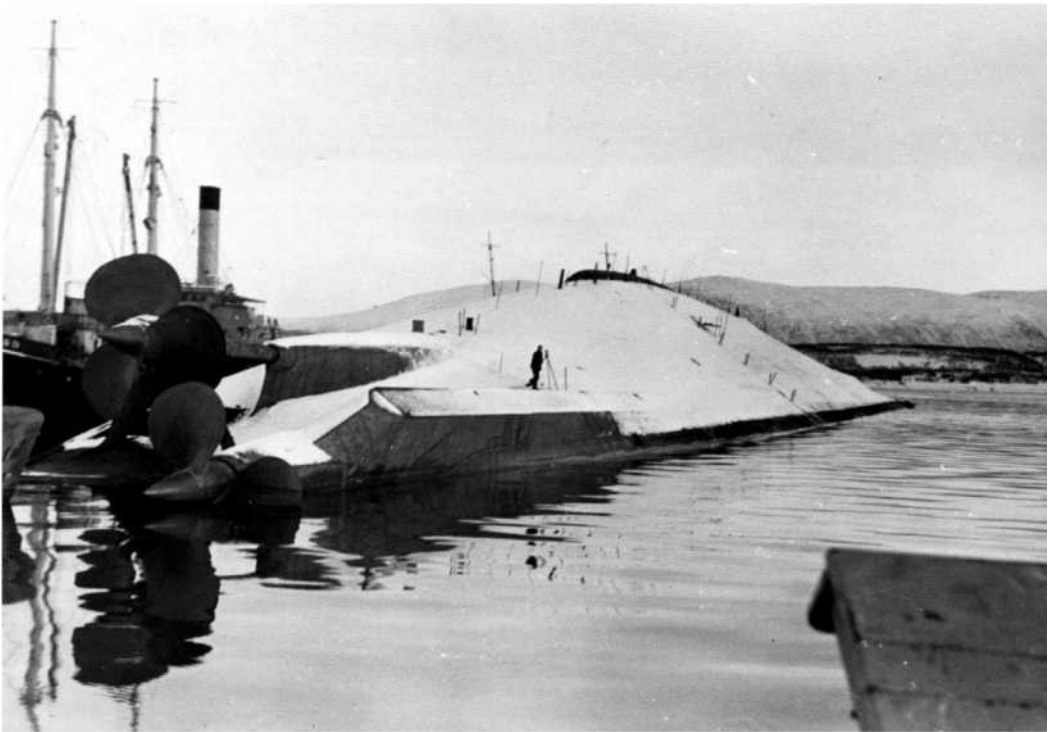








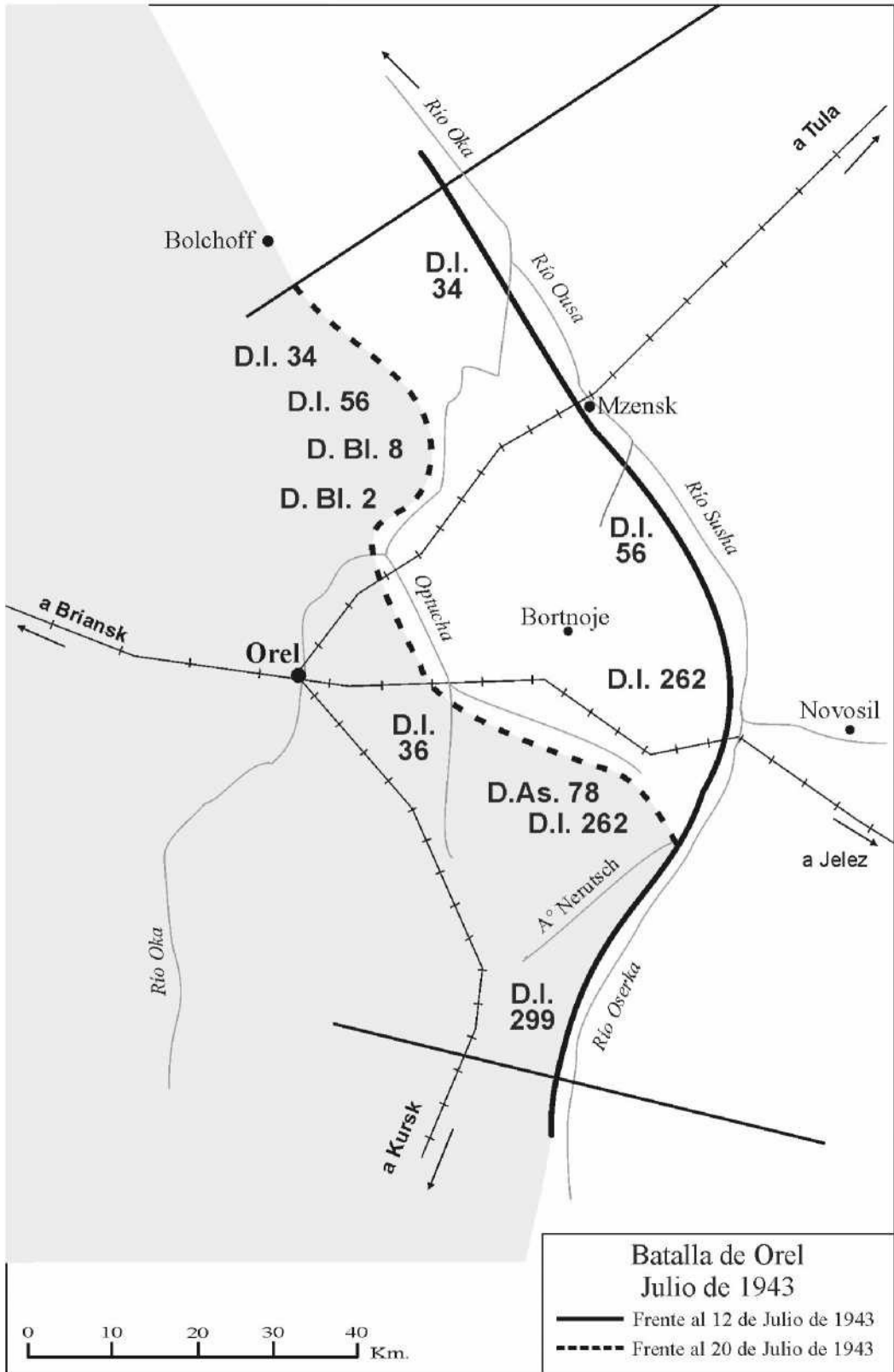




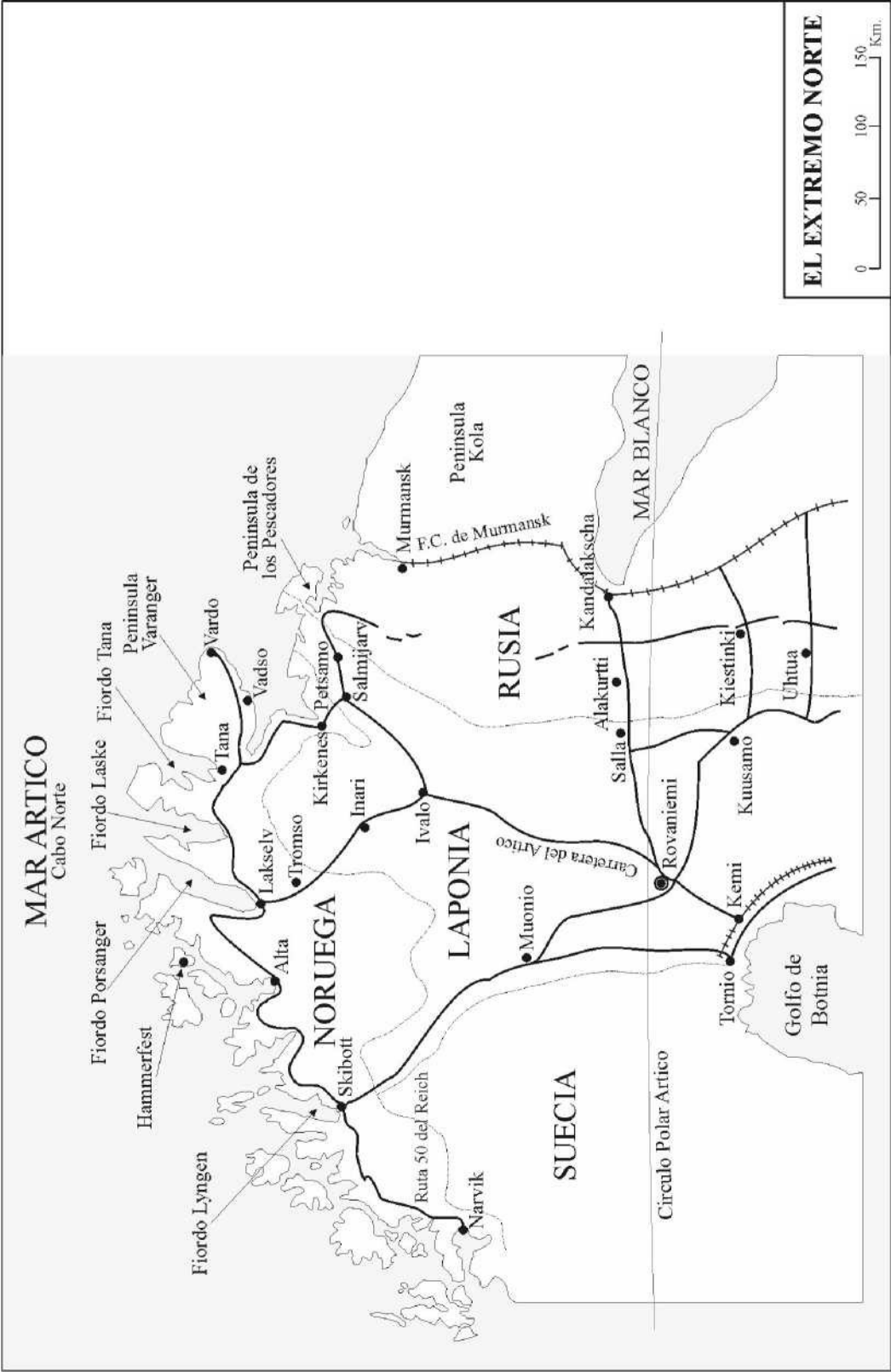










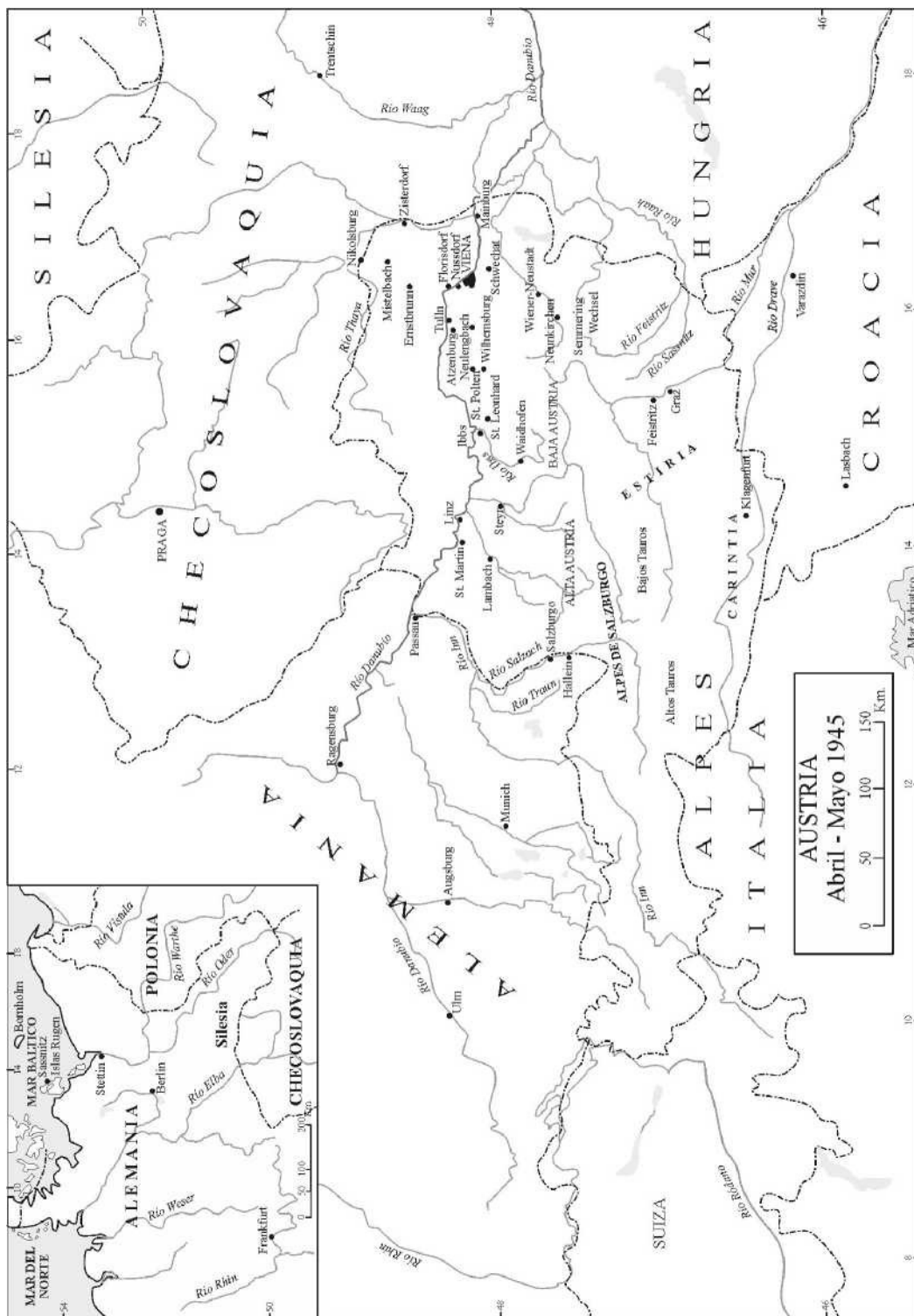




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Mikkeli: Cuartel General de Mannerheim
 Rovaniemi: Cuartel General de Rendulic





Index

<i>SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ABOUT COLONEL GENERAL (R.) DR. LOTHAR RENDULIC</i>	3
Preface	4
RUSSIA	
1. The great problem of the east. Advance towards the Dnieper and first fights.	6
2. Russian offensive in the Rogatschev area. Man and soil in the Bobruisk area.	17
3. The lessons of war in the East. Moscow or the Ukraine. Advance across the Dnieper.	23
4. A Bolshevik teacher. On the dirt roads to Desna. Initiation of the October struggles.	30
5. Forest, lake and Blüthner piano. The Division reaches Suchinitschi.	35
6. Struggles in the Koselisk area. Spiritual orientation of the population.	39
7. In the mud period. 70 km from Moscow! War of position in November. The landscape of Gogol.	45
8. The winter battle begins. Step by step retreat to Detschino. Night attack on Bolscheno.	51
9. The great lord commands. Rest of the units. Balance of the winter crisis.	58
10. Spring mud and partisans. Bombs over Bryansk. Unsuccessful attack on Suchinitschi.	64
11. Commanding General of the XXXV Army Corps. Orel. First repercussions of Stalingrad.	72
12. The Russian soldier and his leadership. Enemy offensive with center of gravity in the XXXV Army Corps.	79
13. The great defensive battle for Orel.	86
BALKANS	
1. Commander-in-Chief with particularly difficult mission. Study of the situation with Löhr in Salonika.	98
2. Before the decision. The Italian surrender.	110
3. New information trips. A large-scale operation against Tito is prepared.	121
4. New reconnaissance in Albania and Montenegro. Large-scale action against Tito.	132
5. Organization of the defense in Dalmatia. Tito's organization is destroyed.	142
LAPLAND	
1. New mission: 20th Mountain Army Command. First orientation: Visit to Mannerheim.	151
2. Start of tasks and inspection in the army zone.	161
3. Political and military recognition continues.	172
4. Separation from Finland is imminent! September 2, 1944: Certainty at last!	180
5. The great retreat begins	189
6. Withdrawal of the mountain army to Norway.	196
NORWAY	
1. Military necessity of the occupation of Norway. Commander-in-chief of Norway.	204
EAST PRUSSIA	
2. For the time being destined for Curland. First measures in the East Prussian crisis.	214
3. Fierce fighting for Samlandia and the Haff road. Continuous Russian offensives against the 4th Army.	222
CURLANDIA	
1. Why was the Army Group left in Curlandia?	229
AUSTRIA	
2. Difficult decollement in Libau	233

Maps

3. Battle of Orel	
4. Balkans	
5. The Far North	274
6. Finland	275
7. East Prussia	276
8. Austria. April-May 1945	277

Photographs

	278
	279
1. General Lothar Rendulic	243
2. Anti-tank vehicle used on the Russian front	244
3. First snow falls on the Russian plains	244
4. Street in a Russian village	245
5. Terrain at the Battle of Orel (Russia)	245
6. Landscape in Central Dalmatia	246
7. Naventa rift valley (Herzegovina)	247
8. Tombstone in an ancient Croatian tomb (IX Century)	247
9. View over Diocletian's palace at Spalato	248
10. The head of the Serbian "Tschetniks" General Mihajlovich	248

244. *Memoirs of Lothar Rendulic*

11. Road on the Dalmatian coast	249
12. Lt. Col. Jack Churchill, taken prisoner in the fighting over the Brac Islands. Brac.	250
He was Commander of a Brigade of "Commandos".	
13. Letter that Jack Churchill wrote to the leader of the Battalion that held him prisoner on the island of Brac.	Brac Island, 251
before leaving the islands.	
14. Descent of the Parachute Fighters on Drvar, to surprise Tito's headquarters. 252	
15. A part of the Parachute Hunters on the edge of Drvar before entering the locality.	252
for the surprise attack on Tito's headquarters.	
16. Reuter's British correspondent sent to Tito is taken prisoner	253
17. After the attack on Tito's headquarters.	254
18. Reich Route 50 in Central Norway	254
19. One of the "Snow tunnels".	255
20. Arctic Sea Highway at the crossing of the Arctic Circle	256
21. Reich's Route 50 in the Arctic Circle	257
22. Talking to the Commander of the garrison in Helsinki	258
23. The Marshal of Finland, Baron Mannerheim	259
24. Mountain Hunters march in the faint light of midday in Northern Norway.	257
25. Rafting service in the Lyngen Fjord. Livestock shelter.	260
26. Salute of the General Chief of the General Staff of the Finnish Army at Mikkeli airfield.	261
27. Battalion Combat Post	262
28. Front land in Central Lapland	262
29. Front land in Central Lapland	263
30. Path in the positions in front of the Arctic Sea	263
31. Rock Cavern	264
32. Annotation in the refuge book. On the right Artillery Gen. Commander of the XIX Mountain Corps	Jodl, 265
33. Bridge over the Kemijoski (600 m. long, 12 m. wide, 70 t. of resistance) 265	
34. Prince Lapland visits Commander in Chief	266
35. The little bear of the 7th Division	267
36. Visit to a field hospital in Lapland	268
37. Soldiers help refugees	269
38. The bombs that caused the sinking of the "Tirpitz".	270
39. The propellers of the "Tirpitz".	270
40. After a British air raid on Oslo	271
41. H. Janikoski's powerhouse	272
42. Submarine shelter in Bergen	272
43. Masked path to the front in Lapland	273
44. Marching at midnight in the Arctic Circle	273